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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTEENTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 22 March 2023

The House met at 1:30 pm

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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.

Miss Cheng Li Hui (Tampines).

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

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 Darryl David (Ang Mo Kio).

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

Ms Foo Mee Har (West Coast).

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.

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

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

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

Mr Kwek Hian Chuan Henry (Kebun Baru).

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

Mr Lee Hsien Loong (Ang Mo Kio), Prime Minister.
Mr Leong Mun Wai (Non-Constituency Member).
Mr Liang Eng Hwa (Bukit Panjang).
Assoc Prof Jamus Jerome Lim (Sengkang).
Ms Sylvia Lim (Aljunied).
Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M (Tampines), Minister for Social and Family Development, Second Minister for Health and Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs.
Assoc Prof Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim (Nee Soon), Minister of State for Home Affairs and National Development.
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).
Mr Ong Ye Kung (Sembawang), Minister for Health.
Ms Joan Pereira (Tanjong Pagar).
Mr Leon Perera (Aljunied).
Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng (Jalan Besar).
Ms Hazel Poa (Non-Constituency Member).
Mr Pritam Singh (Aljunied), Leader of the Opposition.
Ms Rahayu Mahzam (Jurong), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Minister for Law.
Mr Saktiandi Supaat (Bishan-Toa Payoh).
Mr Seah Kian Peng (Marine Parade).
Mr K Shanmugam (Nee Soon), Minister for Home Affairs and Law.
Mr Sharael Taha (Pasir Ris-Punggol).
Ms Sim Ann (Holland-Bukit Timah), Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and National Development and Deputy Government Whip.
Mr Sitoh Yih Pin (Potong Pasir).
Ms Hany Soh (Marsiling-Yew Tee).
Ms Sun Xueling (Punggol West), Minister of State for Home Affairs and Social and Family Development.
Mr Alvin Tan (Tanjong Pagar), Minister of State for Culture, Community and Youth and Trade and Industry.
Ms Carrie Tan (Nee Soon).
Mr Tan Kiat How (East Coast), Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information and National Development.
Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong (Hougang).
Dr Tan See Leng (Marine Parade), Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Trade and Industry.
Ms Jessica Tan Soon Neo (East Coast), Deputy Speaker.
Dr Tan Wu Meng (Jurong).
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 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 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 Cheng Hsing Yao (Nominated Member).
Mr Chong Kee Hiong (Bishan-Toa Payoh).
Mr Chua Kheng Wee Louis (Sengkang).
Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien (Yuhua), Minister for Sustainability and the Environment.
Mr Gan Kim Yong (Chua Chu Kang), Minister for Trade and Industry.
Mr S Iswaran (West Coast), Minister for Transport and Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations.
Prof Koh Lian Pin (Nominated Member).
Mr Lim Biow Chuan (Mountbatten).
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).

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).

Mr Murali Pillai (Bukit Batok).

Ms Poh Li San (Sembawang).

Dr Shahira Abdullah (Nominated Member).

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

Dr Tan Yia Swam (Nominated Member).

Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan (Pioneer).

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

Mr Xie Yao Quan (Jurong).

Mr Alex Yam (Marsiling-Yew Tee).

Ms Yeo Wan Ling (Pasir Ris-Punggol).

PERMISSION TO MEMBERS TO BE ABSENT

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

Name	From	To
	(2023)	(2023)
Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan	15 Mar	24 Mar
Dr Wan Rizal	15 Mar	23 Mar
Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap	18 Mar	25 Mar
Mr Chua Kheng Wee Louis	20 Mar	24 Mar
Ms Low Yen Ling	20 Mar	22 Mar
Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman	20 Mar	22 Mar
Mr Murali Pillai	20 Mar	22 Mar
Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam	20 Mar	28 Mar
Mr Xie Yao Quan	20 Mar	22 Mar
Ms Yeo Wan Ling	20 Mar	22 Mar
Mr Gan Kim Yong	21 Mar	23 Mar
Ms Mariam Jaafar	21 Mar	23 Mar
Mr Mohd Fahmi Aliman	21 Mar	22 Mar
Mr Abdul Samad	22 Mar	22 Mar
Mr Alex Yam	22 Mar	29 Mar
Mr Chong Kee Hiong	22 Mar	26 Mar
Mr Desmond Tan	22 Mar	25 Mar
Dr Janil Puthucheary	22 Mar	25 Mar
Prof Koh Lian Pin	22 Mar	22 Mar
Dr Lim Wee Kiak	22 Mar	27 Mar
Ms Poh Li San	22 Mar	28 Mar
Dr Shahira Abdullah	22 Mar	22 Mar
Dr Tan Yia Swam	22 Mar	22 Mar

[Mr Speaker in the Chair]

1 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for Education (a) whether the Ministry can provide an update on the adequacy of the supply of school bus services; (b) whether an update on the same can be provided specifically for Special Education schools; and (c) what is the average increase in school bus fares seen in 2022.

The Minister of State for Education (Ms Gan Siow Huang) (for the Minister for Education): The Ministry of Education (MOE) has been monitoring the provision of school bus services. The demand for school bus services has been relatively stable, as we continue to have 98% of our Primary 1 students able to obtain a place either in a primary school of their choice or within two kilometres of their residence.

However, based on our engagement with some school bus service providers, they have provided feedback on a shortage of bus drivers, with the post-COVID-19 reopening of the economy being a factor. This was also compounded by the rising fuel prices which have affected the viability of some of these providers.

Despite these challenges, most providers have continued providing school bus services, but have to raise their fares to reflect both rising costs and the need for the industry to attract and retain sufficient school bus drivers. These are issues which MOE is engaging the relevant stakeholders to address.

For most MOE schools, the bus fares have gone up by up to 10% in 2023 compared to 2022, while special education (SPED) schools have generally seen a higher increase due to the smaller pool of bus operators who are able to meet their more complex needs.

To better ensure affordability of transport costs to school for lower-income students, MOE has enhanced the school bus subsidy from 60% of monthly school bus fares to 65% since January 2023. This will reduce the amount paid by the families of these needy students and help mitigate the increase in school bus fares. Beyond that, in situations where the family needs more help, the schools are able to provide more financial assistance to cover the school bus fares.

Likewise, for SPED schools, eligible students taking school bus services can apply for the Enabling Transport Subsidy (ETS), administered by SG Enable, which was increased from 1 July 2022 to help defray the cost of school bus fares. Beyond that, the SPED schools are able to provide further discretionary support to needy students who may need additional help with their school bus fares.

Both the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and MOE will continue to closely monitor the school bus fare situation, and if need be, step up financial support for needy students who have to travel by school bus.

Mr Speaker: Mr Perera.

Mr Leon Perera (Aljunied): I thank the Minister of State for her answer. Just two supplementary questions. My understanding of the school bus operator population is that – and I will stand corrected if this is not borne out by the facts – but my understanding is that it is an ageing population and many of these operators are set up as sole proprietorships. They may employ a very small number of people, may drive the buses themselves. Over time, we can expect that there will be exits from the industry.

Is the Ministry looking at how to address that? Because as the population ages, there could be certain solutions that we need to look at. For example, facilitating these micro businesses to sell their business to a more organised operator – I just mentioned that as one possibility.

My second supplementary question is on the school bus services for SPED schools. I wanted to ask what sort of training is made available to the bus operators for SPED schools, given the complexity that is involved in that, which is different from just operating a bus for mainstream schools. Sometimes, there could be certain types of skills that they need to have in order to do their job effectively. I have encountered one issue with one of my constituents in the Serangoon ward of the Aljunied Group Representative Constituency (GRC). So, I am wondering what sort of training is given to these bus operators.

Ms Gan Siow Huang: I thank the Member for the two supplementary questions. Indeed, the school bus industry is quite a fragmented one, with many sole proprietors. We at MOE ourselves are also beginning to learn about this industry and we are in discussion with other agencies. We are starting to engage the school bus operators to see what kind of help we can provide to facilitate this industry to stay viable in the long term and to support the needs of our students for school bus services.

As to the training, MOE does not provide training to the school bus operators of SPED schools. Instead, what our schools normally do is specify in the contracts what kind of skills and services we require the school bus operators to be equipped with, either for the drivers or the minders in the buses.

WORKING WITH HOSPITALS TO INCREASE USE OF INFANT CAR SEATS

2 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for Transport what are the steps the Ministry has taken to work with hospitals in increasing access to the use of infant car seats.

The Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Transport (Mr Baey Yam Keng) (for the Minister for Transport): Mr Speaker, please allow me, on behalf of the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment (MSE) and PUB, to wish everybody a Happy Water Day.

Now, back to the Ministry of Transport (MOT). Sir, the requirement for the use of appropriate child restraints in private vehicles, such as infant car seats, is a long-standing one which parents are generally aware of.

A range of child restraint solutions are available in the market. We have no plans to work with hospitals to further increase access to the use of infant car seats.

Mr Speaker: Mr Louis Ng.

Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang (Nee Soon): Thank you, Sir. In my Adjournment Motion about a year ago, I had raised this as a recommendation for MOT to work with the hospitals to increase access and use of infant car seats. I believe the Senior Parliamentary Secretary replied in his speech that this is a new idea that he would share with relevant agencies and stakeholders.

So, one, could I ask whether this recommendation has been shared the relevant stakeholders and the relevant agencies as well? And two whether the recommendations I proposed have been looked into, which included I believe the hospitals to include in their prenatal class, the use of infant car seats, the provision of infant car seats to parents who upon discharge do not have one, even including into the bill. I believe the Senior Parliamentary Secretary said all this will be looked into.

Mr Baey Yam Keng: Yes, indeed, we did look into it. And since then, we have checked with the agencies to understand that currently the Traffic Police (TP) has partnered KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) to educate the public on road safety, including road safety for child passengers. For example, TP provided input for KKH's educational collaterals on the use of use of child car seats. Such collaborations have been increasing awareness among parents, especially new parents, about the requirements for child restraints and their correct use.

These current arrangements already are helping parents and we know many parents are concerned about the safety of their children.

As for the Ministry of Health (MOH), MOH's budget subsidises healthcare with the aim of ensuring that basic healthcare remains affordable and accessible for the general population. This includes healthcare services, drugs, devices and various therapeutics and medical technology. Infant car seats are not within the scope of healthcare subsidies.

LARGER ROLE FOR SINGAPORE IN REALISING ASEAN POWER GRID

3 **Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong** asked the Minister for Trade and Industry (a) whether the Government envisions a larger role for Singapore in realising the ASEAN Power Grid; and (b) whether the Government is considering direct investments in renewable and sustainable cross-border electricity infrastructure to ensure electricity sustainability.

The Second Minister for Trade and Industry (Dr Tan See Leng) (for the Minister for Trade and Industry): The ASEAN Power Grid is ASEAN's vision to integrate the national power systems of its 10 member states. This will create opportunities for mutual support and electricity trading among the member states. The support of all ASEAN member states is necessary to realise this vision. And Singapore is committed to playing our part.

Singapore has been working with various countries on pathfinder projects such as the Lao PDR-Thailand-Malaysia-Singapore Power Integration Project. We have also signed several Memoranda of Understanding with like-minded countries such as Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam – and I think Members know, with Indonesia as well – to advance our collective energy interests and facilitate regional decarbonisation.

Last week, Indonesia and Singapore signed the MOU on Renewable Energy Cooperation where we will collaborate on cross-border electricity trading projects.

We are also working with the US on a feasibility study on regional energy connectivity to support the development of the ASEAN Power Grid. The ASEAN Power Grid can facilitate ASEAN's decarbonisation efforts. There is significant renewable energy potential in the Southeast Asia region. Building energy interconnections can help to realise this potential by joining the producing regions to the consumption points or regions.

At this point in time, the Government does not intend to invest directly in cross-border infrastructure. Our focus is to work with regional partners to provide the framework, regulations as well as the ecosystem that will enable commercial players to build the infrastructure. We will continue to work closely with all of our regional partners and with this year's ASEAN Chair, Indonesia, to realise the ASEAN Power Grid.

IMPACT OF MENTAL HEALTH-RELATED CONDITION ON ELIGIBILITY FOR HOME PROTECTION SCHEME

4 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for Manpower (a) whether having a mental health-related condition is a ground for being ineligible for the Home Protection Scheme (HPS); (b) if so, what is the rationale; and (c) what specific mental health-related conditions will prevent the take-up of HPS.

The Minister for Manpower (Dr Tan See Leng): Mr Speaker, Sir, the Home Protection Scheme (HPS) is a mortgage reducing insurance that protects CPF members and their families from losing their HDB flats in the event of the member's death, terminal illness, or total permanent disability.

Having a mental health-related condition is not necessarily a ground that would make a person ineligible for the HPS. Instead, a member's eligibility for the HPS is assessed based on the overall severity, prognosis and control of the medical condition as well as their health risk profile.

Hence, even for members with pre-existing mental health-related conditions, a majority of them are covered under the scheme because their conditions are assessed by medical professionals to be mild or moderate.

Notwithstanding this, the HPS coverage is not extended to applicants with serious pre-existing medical conditions, including serious mental health-related conditions, if they are assessed to have significantly higher risk of mortality. Members of the House, this is in line with industry practice. This ensures the affordability of premiums for the majority of members as well as the viability of the scheme.

Mr Speaker: Mr Perera.

Mr Leon Perera (Aljunied): I thank the Minister. Just two supplementary questions. Firstly, just to clarify my understanding of what he said, the relevant authorities will take a nuanced approach looking at the extent of the mental health condition and also the nature of the mental health condition – I think different types of conditions may have different implications in terms of behaviour and in terms of the propensity to do different things that could affect the actuarial basis of the scheme. So, just want to confirm the understanding that you would be looking at severity as well as the type of mental health conditions to decide on eligibility.

My second supplementary question is, when looking at these issues, does the Government take into consideration that whatever the actuarial science says about people with mental health conditions who go on to schemes like this, that data may have come about in the past when the extent of diagnosis of mental health conditions was maybe much, much less than what it is now and what it will be in the future, with growing awareness of mental health issues and as we move away from the stigmatisation and discrimination of people with mental health conditions, and you can expect that more people will be diagnosed – so, are we using data from the past in order to draw an actuarial conclusion about the present day? Is that taken into consideration as well?

Dr Tan See Leng: Mr Speaker, I think to the first supplementary question, the answer is yes. We do take a nuanced approach; we depend on medical experts; we are certainly not the experts in determining what is the level of severity, the prognosis, to whether the actuarial risks associated with the mortality or morbidity as a result of a particular illness. So, we do take a nuanced approach, but it is based on advice from experts and medical experts, including psychiatric experts, if you talk about mental illness.

What we do need, however, is for the members at the point of signing, to disclose upfront the pre-existing conditions that they have. Because you can imagine and you can surmise or conclude that if you disclose it after the event and you have a pre-existing condition that you do not disclose upfront and if something then happens, after that for you then go back and have all that data, I think it would be very difficult for us to access that data.

To the second supplementary question, in terms of the extent of the diagnosis, we constantly and continuously review the data that is available. And I think this is not something that is carved in stone in terms of the coverage. However, because of the fact that the HPS is constructed to be as widespread and as pervasive as possible to support the broadest segment of our population in their home protection – for them to be able to continue to cover the loans in the event of total permanent disability and so on and so forth – we also want to keep the scheme sustainable and affordable. Hence, the approach is a very balanced, very measured and a calibrated one. I hope that addresses your query.

RESEARCH AND PILOT TRIALS TO PROMOTE AND EXPAND USE OF PRODUCTIVITY-ENHANCING TECHNOLOGIES BY CARE PROVIDERS

5 Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong asked the Minister for Health (a) whether the Ministry is working with research centres in Singapore to pilot, promote and expand the use of productivity-enhancing technologies by care providers; (b) what is the budget that the Ministry provides annually for research and roll-out in this area; and (c) what are the measures of the impact and sustainability of these innovative technologies in terms of how they will improve caregiving or relieve human caregiving.

The Senior Minister of State for Health (Dr Janil Puthucheary) (for the Minister for Health): Mr Speaker, there are several efforts to encourage the use of technology to enhance care. Under the Research, Innovation and Enterprise 2025 (RIE2025) programme, the \$90 million Population Health Research Grant supports projects that seek to improve health outcomes through a population health approach, including projects that aim to optimise resource allocation, improve healthcare manpower productivity and leverage technology to improve health.

The \$18 million Community Care Digital Transformation Plan supports CCOs to adopt a comprehensive suite of digital solutions that help to raise digitalisation levels and improve productivity.

In addition, the National Innovation Challenge (NIC) on Active and Confident Ageing had awarded close to \$70 million to 35 research projects to address the needs of seniors or improve productivity of care staff. One example is a web-based system integrating technology to enhance care at home, including the use of smart home sensors to detect falls, automated pill dispensers to track medication adherence and a nutrition database that recommends meals based on the senior's health condition. Another used artificial intelligence to provide personalised educational resources and care triage services to caregivers. Each project is measured for their impact, with a view to scale them up if proven to be effective.

Mr Speaker: Mr Dennis Tan.

Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong (Hougang): I thank the Senior Minister of State for the answer. Just one clarification. Does the Government think that it should increase its resources, to allocate more resources to develop more and better technologies to better assist caregivers in their everyday roles?

Dr Janil Puthucheary: Sir, the answer is yes. Not all of the resource allocation is tagged specifically to digitalisation or care or elderly. There is great overlap in many of the projects: something that applies to acute care may well have an impact on elderly care; something that applies within the hospital may have an impact on the community; something which is labelled as a productivity improvement may indeed rest on digitalisation.

So, I think we do need to look at the overall effect of our various efforts to improve care, improve productivity, improve the effectiveness of our interventions and, where appropriate, use technology.

REJECTION OF APPLICATIONS FOR VOCATIONAL DRIVERS' LICENCES DUE TO CRIMINAL RECORD

6 **Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song** asked the Minister for Transport in the last three years (a) how many applications for the (i) Taxi Driver's Vocational Licence (ii) Private Hire Car Driver's Vocational Licence (iii) Bus Driver's Vocational Licence (iv) Bus Attendant's Vocational Licence and (v) Omnibus Driver's Vocational Licence were rejected due to the criminal record of the applicants for offences other than rape, murder or kidnapping respectively; and (b) of these, how many appeals were received and how many were approved upon appeal.

The Senior Minister of State for Transport (Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan) (for the Minister for Transport): Of the more than 15,000 vocational licence or VL applications across the different services in 2022, 226 applications or about 1.5% were rejected due to criminal records, including murder, rape and kidnapping.

It is necessary for LTA to screen the VL applications to safeguard the interests of the commuting public. LTA may consider appeals from applicants with criminal records depending on the nature of the case. In 2022, 72 out of these 169 appeals were acceded to. LTA considers such appeals carefully to strike a balance between allowing applicants who committed less severe offences to take on driving as a vocation while safeguarding the safety of passengers.

Mr Speaker: Mr Gerald Giam.

Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song (Aljunied): I thank the Senior Minister of State for her reply. I understand that those who have committed offences like rape, murder and kidnapping will not get a licence. And I think that is a reasonable safeguard for passengers.

However, I have met residents who told me they cannot get back their vocational licence for past convictions for less violent or non-violent offences. This prevents them from earning a living and re-integrating into society.

So, can the Senior Minister of State please provide more clarity on what offences will debar a person from obtaining this licence? I think this will also give some clarity to the passengers to know that drivers who have gotten offences in the past will not be a safety threat to themselves.

Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan: As the Member has rightly pointed out, we need to strike a balance, we need to maintain public confidence, especially for passengers conveyed in public service vehicles, like taxis and private hire cars (PHCs). Whilst we want to give the applicant who has had a criminal record before a second chance in taking up driving as a vocation, we also need to ensure that the interest and safety of commuters are safeguarded.

So, when we look at the applications, the Member has asked whether there are specific offences that we consider. Actually, criminal offences make up a large range. Besides murder, rape and kidnapping, there is a real wide range of such offences. We will consider them on a case-by-case basis because it is not just the severity of the offence, but also when the offence was committed and also any other mitigating factors like recalcitrance and so on.

So, when an appeal comes in, we will look at it on a case-by-case basis, based on its own merit and make an independent assessment.

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF CHILDCARE CENTRES AND KINDERGARTENS AFFECTED BY HAND, FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE EACH YEAR

7 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for Health what is the annual number and percentage of (i) childcare centres and (ii) kindergartens affected by Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease for each year in the past five years.

The Senior Minister of State for Health (Dr Janil Puthucheary) (for the Minister for Health): Mr Speaker, the Ministry of Health (MOH) monitors the hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) situation through a sentinel surveillance programme involving selected hospitals, polyclinics and GP clinics.

HFMD is a mild and self-limiting illness and there were no reported severe HFMD cases since 2019. HFMD is common during childhood and it is not unusual to have HFMD cases or clusters of two or more cases in preschools. Based on data from 2018 to 2022, the annual number of preschools with HFMD clusters ranged from 352 to 1,073 for childcare centres and 34 to 152 for kindergartens, accounting for about 23% to 66% of childcare centres and 11% to 37% of kindergartens.

The numbers of reported clusters in childcare centres and kindergartens had decreased in 2020 and 2021, likely influenced by COVID-19-related community safe management measures. Although the numbers of reported clusters had increased in 2022, it is too soon to determine whether this reflects a rising trend beyond that seen in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr Speaker: Mr Ng.

Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang: I thank the Senior Minister of State for the reply. Can I just confirm, one, that MOH is able to close preschools, I believe for up to 10 days, to be able to break the chain of infections of HFMD? And two, what support the Ministry will provide to parents during these closures who have no alternative childcare arrangements?

Dr Janil Puthucheary: Sir, I thank Mr Louis Ng for the questions. Closure of preschools is only one of the strategies and one of the tools when an outbreak occurs of HFMD or other mild, self-limiting, low severity diseases which are common in the community. The key to controlling spread is through early detection, isolation, maintaining high standards of personal and environmental hygiene – washing hands, covering the mouth and nose, avoiding sharing food and drinks or personal items.

At MOH, we work closely with the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) and the Ministry of Education (MOE) to monitor outbreaks of infectious diseases in preschools. We provide public health advice, including on how to prevent infection and implement control measures. We will continue to work with ECDA and the relevant agencies on the issues of how to support the preschool sector as well as the parents to deal with clusters and outbreaks of diseases such as HFMD.

IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT OF FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME DRIVERS FROM EXPANSION OF COVERAGE OF PROGRESSIVE WAGE MODEL

8 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for Manpower where the recent expansion of the Progressive Wage Model sector coverage included drivers on contract of service for both full-time and part-time drivers, what safeguards will be put in place for these drivers who may now face termination of their contracts by their employers and re-hired back to service the employers as platform drivers to save cost for their employer.

The Senior Minister of State for Manpower (Mr Zaqy Mohamad) (for the Minister for Manpower): Speaker, if an employer terminates an employee's contract of service, but still engages the worker's services under conditions that effectively makes the worker an employee, this is misclassification of an employee to avoid employer obligations.

MOM will investigate such cases and take action against employers where warranted.

In a tight labour market, employers must also consider carefully how they contract with their workers, or they may face difficulties ensuring sufficient manpower to meet business needs. For example, an employee who is terminated and rehired under a contract for service may choose to leave and join another company as an employee, for greater employment certainty.

To help employers with the expansion of the Progressive Wage Model, the Government has introduced the Progressive Wage Credit Scheme (PWCS) as transitional support. The PWCS funds up to 75% of the wage increases given in 2023 to employees earning up to \$2,500 and 45% for those earning above \$2,500 up to \$3,000. We encourage employers to take the opportunity to uplift wages, and upgrade the productivity and skills of lower-wage workers.

Mr Speaker: Dr Tan Wu Meng.

Dr Tan Wu Meng (Jurong): I thank the Senior Minister of State for his answer. I have got one supplementary question. What efforts and programmes are in place to make sure that workers in general in the labour market, especially older workers who may be either less literate or less up to date with media news, what measures are there to help workers be aware of this potential practice of misclassifying an employer-employee relationship?

I asked this in the context of a previous Parliamentary Question (PQ) I raised to Senior Minister of State Dr Koh Poh Koon in the previous parliamentary Sitting about the risk of platform companies' practice of classifying jobs that previously were employee jobs and re-gazetting them as gig platform contracts; and I asked about the risk of such practices catching on in other sectors. So, I was wondering in context of that, would the Senior Minister of State Mr Zaqy be able to share more? How are we helping workers be aware and to protect themselves?

Mr Zaqy Mohamad: I thank the Member for his questions. I think for most employees, they know their general rights. If something amiss comes about, where you are terminated unfairly, you can always come to the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) or one of the unions, especially for those under Progressive Wage, where most are pretty much covered by the unions.

As far as we know, today, neither MOM nor any of our lead sector agencies have received any complaints with regard to termination and being converted to be self employees. So, I think in a tight labour market, as I have explained, one who is unfairly terminated and being asked to come back as a platform worker, for example, I think that is unfair. But they do have choices too to work for someone else. Certainly, for the the employer, it is not too wise to do so, in a sense that once you are self-employed, you can serve multiple employees too. So, then, therefore, the employer loses the worker as well.

But if you come across any of such cases, whether among your Clementi residents or otherwise, please feel free to come to MOM.

1.59 pm

Mr Speaker: Order. End of Question Time. Ministerial Statement, Mr Shanmugam.

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ON POLICE DISCLOSURE

(Statement by Minister for Home Affairs and Law)

1.59 pm

The Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law (Mr K Shanmugam): Sir, I will address some matters arising from my answer to Mr Leong Mun Wai's Parliamentary Question (PQ) on 20 March 2023.

After the discussion in Parliament, Mr Leong made a Facebook post about it on Monday night. Given the nature of some of his statements, which are serious misrepresentations, I had wanted to address them in Parliament yesterday, at the earliest opportunity. But out of respect for Mr Leong's bereavement over the passing of his mother, I decided to postpone, though his post was put up a few hours earlier. I also express my deepest condolences to him and I am sure Members will join me in that.

The matter I am going to speak about arises from his post. Mr Leong's actions are quite improper, as I will show. What he has done is wrong and contrary to the requirements of Parliamentary procedure.

On 20 March 2023, I answered a PQ from Mr Leong and Mr Perera. The answer was detailed. I specifically asked Mr Leong to tell us which parts of the answer he disagreed with. He did not respond and we moved on.

Then, that same night, Mr Leong put up a Facebook post. He said several things including that: one, my characterisation of Mr Lee Hsien Yang and Mrs Lee Suet Fern as having essentially absconded, is inaccurate; two, he also said that by disclosing the investigation into the Lees, Senior Minister Teo and I have risked turning Parliament into "a platform to colour public opinion on criminal proceedings."

These statements are a mixture of misrepresentation and inaccuracy and have to be dealt with.

Mr Leong makes these allegations and more, but he does not deal with the main points. The main points of the answer I gave on Monday, which Mr Leong has avoided, are: first, the Court of Three Judges (C3J) and the Disciplinary Tribunal (DT) have said that Mr Lee Hsien Yang and Mrs Lee Suet Fern had lied under oath and that there was dishonesty. Members can refer to the answer I gave on Monday.

Sir, at this juncture, I would like to ask the Member through you, does he agree that the C3J and the DT have said that Mr Lee Hsien Yang and Mrs Lee Suet Fern lied on oath?

Mr Speaker: Mr Leong.

Mr Leong Mun Wai (Non-Constituency Member): Speaker, that was fast. Allow me enough time to ventilate, because sometimes, I have to put the thing into the context, since I have been specially called back to face the Minister.

With regard to his question, I have read about the Judgment and the opinion of the DT and C3J. But I have also been told that the new allegations raised by the Senior Minister and Ministers are actually new allegations, like perjury. Has it been established during the C3J? I do not know, I am not legally trained. For example, you know, perjury.

And then, on Monday, the Minister talked about absconding. So, we asked has a written order been issued? He confirmed only an email. Maybe he will give us more information afterwards.

Mr Speaker: Mr Leong, I believe the Minister has the rest of his Statement. He is asking for a specific response to a particular position. You will have your chance to ventilate later.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Yes.

Mr Speaker: And the reason why we are doing this is that, in Parliament, when there are issues being raised, we would like the issues to be debated fully here and not in part, and then, thereafter, making statements outside. And that is why there is a need for us to discuss the issue now.

So, perhaps, if you can respond directly to those questions what your views are and then allow the Minister to finish his Statement, and then, we will have ample opportunities for you to say what you need to say.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Yes, but Speaker, I hope you also understand that in this House —

Mr K Shanmugam: Sir, point of order. I asked a question. I am sure the Member can have plenty of time to ventilate at the end.

I asked a simple question; does he agree that the C3J and the DT have said that Mr Lee Hsien Yang and Mrs Lee Suet Fern lied on oath. That is all. If the Member can give me an answer, he can give it to me. If he cannot, we will move on.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: I think it is subject to legal interpretation.

Mr Speaker: Okay, if that is your position, then we allow the Minister to carry on.

Mr K Shanmugam: So, the Member does not know whether the C3J and DT have said that Mr Lee Hsien Yang and Mrs Lee Suet Fern lied on oath. Can I take that to be the answer? Can I ask that through you, Sir, that he does not know?

Mr Speaker: He has said what he said, we can leave it to the rest to interpret. Minister, please continue. Unless Mr Leong have a response to that?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: No, I know it has been said, but I think within the legal interpretation —

Mr K Shanmugam: What has been said?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: It is what you have said.

Mr K Shanmugam: Thank you. Therefore, you will agree that the C3J and DT have said that Mr Lee Hsien Yang and Mrs Lee Suet Fern lied on oath.

Second, Sir, can I ask through you, would the Member accept that, if they did lie on oath, that that is possible criminal conduct?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, Sir, that is why this whole issue is not about "if". It is about if you want to raise a new —

Mr K Shanmugam: Point of order again, Sir. The Member can talk about what he wishes at the end. My question is a simple one. If they lied on oath, is it possible criminal conduct? Either he knows or he does not know, and we will move on.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: No. Speaker, can I say that I am not going to answer the Minister like answering in Court. This is a legislative chamber. This is not a legal chamber. I have my way of answering.

Mr Speaker: Okay, if you can respond quickly. What is your response to that or no response for the moment?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: No, what I said just now, Speaker, is that you do not put in new "ifs" or "whats" in this Parliament. If you have "ifs" and "whats", let the Court decide. That is what we are trying to drive at.

Mr Speaker: Minister.

Mr K Shanmugam: Thank you, Sir. One more question through you, Sir. If there was possible criminal conduct, would the Member accept that that should be properly investigated?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, it is an "if" again. But for this question —

Mr Speaker: If I may, it is a question of process. "If something like that were to happen, would that be...?", we are not ascertaining whether, in your views, whether you think they are guilty or not. If there is, should that — so that is your question.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Correct. If there is a criminal offence, of course, it has to be investigated.

Mr K Shanmugam: That is one point. The second point — Mr Lee Hsien Yang and Mrs Lee Suet Fern have left Singapore and have said they will not come back, after being asked to assist in investigations. I said on Monday, in my summary, that they have essentially absconded from the jurisdiction. The facts have been stated in Senior Minister Teo's answer on 2 March 2023 and in statements issued by the Police, on 2 and 20 March 2023.

On 9 June 2022, Police met Mr Lee Hsien Yang and Mrs Lee Suet Fern and asked them to assist in investigations. They agreed to come for an interview. They said they will tell the Police when they will be available. Police then handed them a letter providing details of the investigation and the interview.

Mr Speaker, Sir, can I have your permission for a copy of that letter to be shown on screen, please?

Mr Speaker: Please do. *[A slide was shown to hon Members. Please refer to [Annex 1](#).]*

Mr K Shanmugam: The blank spaces that Members see were filled in by hand, by the officer. So, the form was given with details filled in.

I had said in my response to Ms Sylvia Lim on Monday, that there was an email. Actually, this form was given and there were email exchanges after that.

The Police then liaised with Mr Lee Hsien Yang on a suitable date over email and both parties agreed on a date, which was 13 July 2022. On 13 July 2022, the day of the interview, they sent an email to the Police saying they would not be attending the interview; by that time, they had left the country.

From what they have said to the Police and what Mr Lee Hsien Yang has said since, it is clear that they have no intention of returning. After Senior Minister Teo gave his reply in Parliament on 2 March 2023, Mr Lee Hsien Yang said in a Facebook post on 7 March that he has, I quote, "been made a fugitive by [his] own country". I have asked for his post to be flashed on the screen. *[Please refer to [Annex 2](#).]*

And on 12 March 2023, he reposted in Instagram, his Facebook post that he is a "fugitive". And he said in an interview with a foreign news outlet released on 8 March 2023 that he is, quote, "unlikely to return to Singapore, at least for the foreseeable future."

He himself admits that he is a fugitive.

To assist Mr Leong in better understanding the dictionary meaning of "fugitive", I will flash it on the screen and I will just read two. [*Please refer to [Annex 3](#).*] From Merriam-Webster: a fugitive is a person who flees or tries to escape, such as a person involved in a criminal case, who tries to elude law enforcement, especially by fleeing the jurisdiction. Macmillan's definition: someone who has done something illegal and is trying to avoid being caught by the police. You can also look at Longman, Oxford, Cambridge.

This is how Mr Lee describes himself, he says that he has run away to avoid the Police.

Sir, the Member knows Mr Lee Hsien Yang well; he has said on social media that Mr Lee is a valuable member of his Party. They have posted many photos together. They have shared each other's posts. For all we know, they might be in regular contact with each other.

Sir, I would like to ask Mr Leong, through you, is Mr Leong saying in this Chamber, that Mr Lee Hsien Yang will come back and cooperate with the authorities? A simple question. No need to ventilate. We can ventilate later.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Mr Speaker, Sir. Yes, Mr Lee Hsien Yang is a member of the Progress Singapore Party (PSP). But the real issue here that we are discussing is about fairness and equality before the law. It is not about whether he is a member of the PSP or not. And whether every citizen is given fair and equal treatment.

Whatever Mr Lee said in his post, when we name a person to have absconded, we must follow our criminal procedure properly. So, if you have not issued him a written order, then your process has a problem. And you do not have the right to say that he has absconded.

Mr K Shanmugam: That is not the question I asked. I take it that the Member does not wish to say whether Mr Lee Hsien Yang will come back and cooperate with the authorities.

And, Sir, there is nothing flawed with the process. Police have explained the process and I repeat, both in this House and I am prepared to repeat it outside, Mr Lee Hsien Yang has absconded, on the facts. That is my position. That is consistent with what Mr Lee Hsien Yang himself has said, that he is a fugitive. And you have seen the dictionary definitions.

So, let us not engage in false rhetoric. I will carry on with my Ministerial Statement.

Everyone, including Mr Leong, knows that they have left the country, that they are "fugitives" and they have told the media they are not returning to Singapore. They have absconded.

So, let us not hide behind a smoke screen of whether or not a Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) order was issued. They were asked to cooperate and they have run away. And you can say they have absconded, when they themselves know they are "fugitives".

That deals with the two main points I have made.

Let me now move on to the Keppel & Offshore Marine (KOM) matter which Member has posted about.

I told the Member on Monday, I had explained the differences between KOM and the case involving Mr Lee Hsien Yang and Mrs Lee Suet Fern, and why they are different. I had also explained in my answer on 20 March, why in some circumstances when some names are disclosed in legal proceedings, nevertheless, Police may not release the names here. I invited him to point out so we can discuss which area of my explanation he does not understand or disagrees with. He did not respond.

Let me address a fundamental point arising from what he said on Monday. He said there are double standards because the individuals in the KOM case are, I quote his words, "actually guilty". Sir, the Member has Parliamentary Privilege to speak, but that has to be exercised responsibly. When we want to say that someone is "guilty", I would like to remind all Members to have a care.

Mr Leong has said that persons investigated by CPIB are, I quote, "actually guilty". That is making assertions against a number of persons, that they are guilty of criminal offences, that they have been found guilty of criminal offences, when in fact, they have not been found guilty. Not all the persons. The Cambridge dictionary definition of "guilty" is "responsible for breaking a law".

So, Sir, I will now invite Mr Leong, through you, to either substantiate his statement, that they are all guilty, or withdraw his statement. One cannot, under the cloak of Parliamentary Privilege, make these sorts of statements about people. And if he does not withdraw, then Sir, we will consider what else needs to be done.

Mr Speaker: Mr Leong.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, may I ask the Minister? I actually was the first to raise the issue that whether the Senior Minister and Minister should make such statements in this Parliament. And now, he is turning it around and says that I have made certain statement.

But I will answer his question first and I hope he answers the question I will ask, fully, later.

When I say these individuals are guilty, because this is based on the information that we have obtained about what happened overseas, in the overseas jurisdiction. What the Singapore Court's decision is, we know that the CPIB decided not to prosecute them.

But at the same time, we also want to know not to prosecute, does it also mean that in the stern warning letter, there is really —when a stern warning letter is issued, does it mean that there are actually sufficient evidence to show that they are guilty, but there are some reasons that the CPIB decide not to prosecute them?

Mr K Shanmugam: I raise a point of order. I had asked a simple question. Is the Member saying they have been found guilty, all of them, in any court of law? Or is he otherwise prepared to withdraw his statement? That is all I have asked. If he says he is not prepared to withdraw, we leave it and we follow up.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: I have the impression that they are found guilty in the overseas court of law.

Mr K Shanmugam: Can I know what is the basis on which the Member says that he is under that impression; that they have all been found guilty?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: This is based on the case; the case has been such a big case overseas and in Singapore. And the Keppel Corp has paid such a big fine overseas.

Mr K Shanmugam: Can I suggest that Member works a little bit, finds out what he is talking about, before coming here and making serious allegations? If I were to tell him that his statement is false, it is untrue to say that they have all been found guilty elsewhere, certainly not in Singapore, is he prepared to withdraw his statement?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, if the Minister said that they have not been found guilty overseas, then I am prepared to withdraw my statement.

Mr K Shanmugam: Well, for the record, one person pleaded guilty in the United States. To the best of my knowledge, no one else has been found guilty. And it is a very serious statement to come here, make allegations without doing your homework and then propagate this sort of stuff – all over the place; really unparliamentary and not acceptable. And then to say, "Well, I have read", "It seems to be big".

Unfortunately, this is a thread running through all of Mr Leong's statements. He does not do his homework. He does not check. He just says all sorts of things. And that is not the way debates ought to go. I am glad Mr Leong has withdrawn that statement.

Next, and therefore the basis on which Mr Leong says, "Oh, you know it is similar to this case", it is not there. And I had given various other reasons why there are differences. He never dealt with any of them.

Next, Parti Liyani. Sir, Mr Leong said that my referring to Parti Liyani is an attempt to muddy the waters because the case is irrelevant. The Member has ascribed an improper motive to me. The essence of his statement is that I used an example which is irrelevant and that it was used to confuse Parliament. If that is what he thought, if he had said it, I would have responded immediately.

Sir, let me make this clear. We have no problem, I certainly have no problem with Members challenging me, debating. The tougher the debate, the better it is, because the public then gets a better sense of which opinion is better or where the facts are. So, we welcome debate. We want debate.

But when a statement is made in Parliament and the Member does not respond; and then goes out, and particularly when I said is there anything that you disagree with or you do not understand, and he keeps quiet. He keeps quiet and then goes out and says this.

I explained why the Parti Liyani case is relevant. It is an illustration of a fairly similar case where we also released the identity of a person who was being investigated and where the Member was present and did not object.

So, Sir, again, I will have to trouble you. I seek a clarification from Mr Leong, through you. Why does he say the Parti Liyani case is not relevant?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker. First of all, I want to clarify, in my opinion, that even in our debate in this House, it is not necessary that all the time we have enough time and opportunities to refute every point. How long have we lasted —

Mr K Shanmugam: Sir, I have a point of order.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Okay, just one point.

Mr K Shanmugam: Point of order. Is he saying I am not telling the truth when I invited Members to respond to me? If he disagrees —

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, I did not say Minister is not saying the truth —

Mr K Shanmugam: We are sticking to this debate —

Mr Leong Mun Wai: I am saying that we may not —

Mr Speaker: Mr Leong, pause. Minister, complete the statement.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: I am just —

Mr Speaker: Mr Leong, just pause.

Mr K Shanmugam: On this debate, I expressly invited Members' response. He was given adequate time. So, let us not confuse the matters.

Mr Speaker: Mr Leong.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, I disagree with the Minister. I do not think the debate that we had on Monday had lasted long enough. I have some more questions.

Mr Speaker: Mr Leong, if I recall, questions were asked, you did not respond. You had every opportunity. If you had raised your hands to respond, the time would have been given to you to do that.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Well, Speaker, you have a very good memory. But okay, I will answer —

Mr Speaker: Maybe just to clarify. Would that be a correct description? The question was asked. You did not respond to it.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: It is not totally true. I think —

Mr Speaker: So, you did respond to the question?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: I had the opportunity to talk two times. But I wanted a third time to talk. But before I could —

Mr Speaker: You did not raise your hand to ask.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Before I could raise my hand, it went to another question already.

Mr Speaker: Well, the point is made. Minister.

Mr K Shanmugam: Sir, I specifically asked and I do not recall the Member raising his hands. We can look at the video because these things are on video now. I give an opportunity to the Member to correct himself. It would be accurate to say that we asked and Member did not respond. Would the Member agree, Sir?

Mr Speaker: And if I may add, Mr Leong, are you alleging that I did not give you the time to respond? Are you saying that?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: I am saying that the debate could have been longer.

Mr Speaker: No, no. I am asking a question. Because the questions were asked; I was watching whether you had responses. You did not raise your hands further. Would that be fair? Because I think I need to clarify for myself. Are you alleging that I am not permitting you the space to respond?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Well, Speaker, sometimes, when we are debating an issue like this, it needs time to digest. Sometimes, it may take a bit of time to respond. But when the process just moves through so fast, there will be —

Mr K Shanmugam: Sorry, Sir, can I ask the Member? We had a debate, exchange, answered his question. I asked him. He did not put up his hand. And Mr Perera asked a follow-up question. And there being no further questions, the matter, Parliament proceedings moved on. That is what happened. Can I put that on the record? And can I invite the Member to agree that that is what happened?

Mr Speaker: Mr Leong.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, I think in the sake of time, let me answer your question about Karl Liew.

Mr K Shanmugam: No, I have just said, this is what happened. That is correct, is it not? We can check the video.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Yes, I think probably I was digesting the information at that time.

Mr K Shanmugam: Thank you.

So, now I have asked, why does the Member say in his Facebook post that the Parti Liyani case is not relevant? I want to know the substance. Why do you say it is not relevant?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, may I answer the Minister?

Mr Speaker: Yes, please.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Yes, we did not object to the disclosure of Karl Liew, because it was indeed in the public interest. The case of non-disclosure of the KOM executives has not taken place yet. So, our issue is about the non-disclosure of the KOM executives and the fair treatment between the KOM case and the Lee Hsien Yang case.

Mr K Shanmugam: Sir, I am asking something quite different. I am asking a clarification for Mr Leong on his Facebook post, which suggested the Parti Liyani case that I referred to is not relevant. And I would like to know from Mr Leong why he says that it is not relevant. And if he does not know the answer, he can just tell us.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, I did not say it is not relevant. I said it muddied the water.

Mr K Shanmugam: Sir, through you, can I ask, when you say a case is used to muddy the waters, what you are saying is it is not relevant and it is used to confuse Parliament. That is, in essence, what "muddy the waters" means. So, I want to ask through you, Sir, again, does Mr Leong accept that the Parti Liyani case is relevant?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, I do not accept that the Parti Liyani case is relevant for this debate because — Minister, let me finish.

Mr K Shanmugam: I do not need anything else. He can —

Mr Speaker: We can let Mr Leong have a quick response on why it is not relevant.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Minister, in that case, I am not going to answer any more of your question. This is not court —

Mr Speaker: Mr Leong. I am allowing you the space to elaborate on your response.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Okay. So, because the issue here is about the fairness of the KOM case and the Lee Hsien Yang case. So, you do not need to bring in a new case. When you bring in a new case, in a way, you are clouding the thinking of people.

Mr Speaker: Okay, thank you.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: I did not say it is irrelevant. I did not say you are confusing Parliament. Minister, do not put words into my mouth.

Mr K Shanmugam: Sir, may I ask what is the meaning of "muddy the waters"?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, now Minister is testing whether I am from a lousy school or not.

Mr Speaker: No, Mr Leong, I think the reason is this. There are reasons why we have debates in Parliament — so that we can debate the issues here, clarify and so on.

But when we carry on the debate in a one-dimensional way outside, I think the idea here is to continue that. Because certain statements are made in your statements. I think the request is to let us clarify to make sure that we tease out what exactly is the clarity that the public wants to know.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: But, Speaker, I must say, this kind of questioning is not what a legislative chamber should be.

Mr Speaker: No, I think if allegations are made in —

Mr Leong Mun Wai: But, never mind, I will —

Mr Speaker: Hang on. If allegations are made in Parliament, certain statements are made, I think it is free for Members to question and query.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Yes, so I —

Mr Speaker: So, the question is, you made a statement, out in your Facebook post about "muddy the waters" and the Minister is asking, what exactly do you mean? There is no allegation about what school you came from. I am sure you are from a very good school.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Yes, but the Minister already said that I am saying this because it is irrelevant, I am trying to imply it is irrelevant, I am trying to say that he is confusing the Parliament, which I did not say. Do you agree?

Mr Speaker: So, the question he is asking is, what do you mean when you say "muddy the waters".

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Okay, then now I will say. Do you agree to that, Minister? I did not say it is irrelevant. I did not say that you are confusing Parliament.

Mr K Shanmugam: Can I take it that you say the Parti Lyani case is relevant to the current discussion?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: I did not say it is relevant. I am going to answer —

Mr K Shanmugam: So, it is neither relevant nor irrelevant. So, what is it?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Okay.

Mr K Shanmugam: And what does "muddy the waters" mean?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: "Muddy the waters", in my understanding of English is that, you cloud the real issues. That is why you are swimming in the muddy water, you cloud the real issues because you introduce new things into the discussion.

Mr K Shanmugam: "You cloud the waters", "you introduce new things" so that people cannot see the facts. It is irrelevant and you are introducing it. That is what you are saying. Can I ask that question, Sir, for the last time?

Mr Speaker: Yes, please.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, I am not going to answer that.

Mr Speaker: Noted.

Mr K Shanmugam: Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Minister, continue.

Mr K Shanmugam: Sir, this is a serious allegation. Will the Member withdraw his allegation that Parti Lyani was referred to, in order to "muddy the waters"?

And will the Member accept that it was quite wrong to have suggested motives on a false basis? Because I have explained why it is relevant. You can disagree here, but if you do not disagree, and you keep quiet, and you go out there, then I am entitled to ask this, and say it is not my intention to leave the matters be here, if the Member would not withdraw his allegation.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Sorry, Speaker, can I ask the Minister to repeat his question?

Mr Speaker: Minister, if you can indulge us.

Mr K Shanmugam: I asked whether the Member is prepared to withdraw his allegation that Parti Lyani's case was referred to, in order to "muddy the waters".

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, I am not going to withdraw that.

Mr K Shanmugam: Thank you. Sir, Mr Leong also asserted in his post that this is a private matter, quote, "fundamentally a family dispute", and that it is not appropriate for Parliament, which is supposed to be a forum for debating issues of public interest, to discuss the issue concerning Mr Lee Hsien Yang and Mrs Lee Suet Fern.

Members will recall – issues relating to 38 Oxley Road were first made public by Mr Lee Hsien Yang, himself, in 2017; then in a series of public statements. The Ministerial Statements in 2017 Parliament debates on 38 Oxley Road all took place here in Parliament. Earlier this month, a question was asked in Parliament on 38 Oxley Road. We answered. I explained on Monday why the matter had to be answered, in response to a PQ.

I would like to seek a clarification from Mr Leong, Sir, on which part of the explanation does he disagree with, through you.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, I understand that 38 Oxley Road is a matter that is of public interest. That, I agree; and even if it was debated in Parliament before the time I came into Parliament, I have no issue with that.

But when there are further developments to that, especially with regard to the personal behaviours of Mr Lee Hsien Yang and Mrs Lee Suet Fern, I do not think there is a need to raise those issues in Parliament again. That is what I am trying to drive at.

Mr K Shanmugam: Well, then that is a false basis because the issue came about because there was a question that was raised and answers were given.

Sir, we have had this exchange today, for one reason only: Parliament is a place for debates. Parliament is a place where we exchange viewpoints. And on the basis that we are all trying to do our best for Singapore, we, through the exchange of ideas and debates, try and get to a point.

But when someone is in the House, does not raise a point, says that, well, he was digesting it; and then, goes out and puts a Facebook post with both improper statements and untrue statements: then he is abusing Parliamentary privilege, he is in breach of Parliamentary rules. And that is why we have to pull it up and ask a number of questions. That is why I decided to ask the Member a number of questions. Because Parliament should not be brought into disrepute with this kind of conduct.

Sir, we take a serious view of his conduct. This is not the first time Mr Leong has breached the rules of Parliamentary procedure. I will give three instances.

On 25 February 2021, Mr Leong apologised in Parliament for misrepresentations he had made.

On 10 May 2021, he again seriously breached Parliamentary procedure and was told so.

On 8 March 2022, he again had to apologise in Parliament, for his improper and uncalled for comments.

This has unfortunately become a pattern with Mr Leong.

In Parliament, we are prepared, as I said, for serious debate. Members can be as tough as they wish. And if anyone has questions, they can be raised as we are discussing, rather than keeping quiet here and then, going out and casting aspersions.

Let me read out section 31(g) of Parliamentary Privileges Immunities and Powers Act: "No person shall publish any statement, whether in writing or otherwise, which falsely or scandalously defames, or which reflects on the character of the Speaker or any Member touching on his conduct in Parliament or anything done or said by him in Parliament."

You have your view points, you think that someone is not telling the truth, you think that someone is being dishonest, you think someone is trying to muddy the waters – do that in Parliament. Let us have a debate.

But you do not go out after keeping quiet here and try and mislead the public. That is the rationale for section 31, and that is why we have to take a serious view.

Parliament is a place for discussion – I agree entirely with Mr Leong. But it is not a place for playing hide and seek. You debate here.

In my view, he has breached section 31. That is my view, in the context of his post. And Sir, through you, I ask that he deletes his post, accepts that he has misrepresented the position, and he should apologise. I do that through you, Sir.

Mr Speaker: When you are ready.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, I would only agree to delete my post if the Minister points out specifically again, what are the issues of my post? Muddying the waters is not something that is an issue. Please elaborate again, how does that word "muddy the waters" become an issue.

Mr K Shanmugam: I went through it, but for his benefit, I will say that again.

I explained why Parti Lyani's case was relevant. In that case, the High Court had expressed the view that Mr Karl Liew had not acted honestly and had lied on the witness stand – possible offence of perjury. He was being investigated, we disclosed that, here, before it was made public, before he was charged.

In this case, Mr Lee Hsien Yang and Mrs Lee Suet Fern have been said to have lied on oath – possible offence of perjury. That was disclosed here too. It is directly relevant.

If the Member thought that that was not relevant, I am happy for a debate. I am not saying everyone has got to agree with what I said. Hardly. Disagree, explain, debate and so that the public can have a better understanding, if you think it is not relevant. But do not be a coward. Keep quiet here, go out and say, "Oh, it's an attempt to muddy the waters", that is casting aspersions on me, that I am doing this to confuse. That is not acceptable.

That is just one example. The allegations against Senior Minister Teo and myself too.

So, I invite Mr Leong to delete his post, withdraw the statements and apologise, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Mr Leong.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, Sir, I have given my explanation just now, that muddying the waters just means that — in my post, I also said, "let us concentrate on the differences between the Lee Hsien Yang and the KOM cases". That is what I mean.

I am not casting aspersions on the Minister at all. That case will actually cloud the judgement of other people, so let us concentrate on the differences between the Lee Hsien Yang and the KOM case – that is the meaning of that. Is that not acceptable?

Mr K Shanmugam: Sir, I take it that Member does not withdraw the statements. We will then proceed to consider what the next steps ought to be. If at any time Member changes his mind, before a decision is reached, he can let us know.

Thank you, Sir, that is the end of my Ministerial Statement.

Mr Speaker: Are there any clarifications? I am prepared to wait, Mr Leong. Would you want to consider your response?

2.43 pm

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, so, can I confirm that what the Minister has said is that, there are specifically two problems with my post: one is muddying the waters; and two, is the statement I made about Senior Minister and yourself about using this Parliament to say certain things. Are those the only two points you are taking issue with my post?

Then, I want to explain the second point as well.

Mr K Shanmugam: Sir, I highlighted two points for illustration. That is what I would say.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, so my understanding of the processes, of our legal processes is that, when you name someone to have committed perjury or you say someone has absconded, and if the process that we have put in place through our legal system has not been strictly followed, and then you are saying those things in Parliament, is that not something that we should think about, as Members of this House? That is the spirit of what this Parliament should be, that I am trying to write in my post.

Mr K Shanmugam: Sir, I do not propose to debate the post further, except to say this. By speaking about them having lied on oath, as the Courts have said, or them absconding, we do not therefore, prejudge their guilt.

They will have to come back; they will have to be charged, if the Police see fit to charge. And the Courts will have to decide.

As I said in my answer on Monday, when we said that Mr Karl Liew is being investigated for having lied on oath, the comments that were made, we are not prejudging his guilt.

Likewise, when we say that he has absconded, when he himself has described himself as a fugitive, it is entirely in order.

If he is charged for absconding from jurisdiction, he can then explain what he meant. And, certainly, our statements here are not evidence. Our statements here are meant to further our discussions, in furtherance of what actually happened. It is a description of the process that they have run away, without cooperating with the Police. That is what "absconding" means – run away without cooperating with the Police. It can also mean that they have committed an offence of absconding – fugitives from justice.

But let us not split hairs here. When you have run away and you describe yourself as a fugitive, I do not think there is anything wrong in calling you an abscondee, particularly when you have said you will cooperate and then run away without cooperating. I did not say that they have been charged and found guilty. So, let us drop these pretences. Let us just get to the point.

But in any event, Sir, unless there are any other clarifications on my Statement, that is the end of my Statement.

Mr Speaker: Mr Leong.

2.48 pm

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, I will make this my last question to the Minister. So, does the Minister agree that before the due legal process is being followed, Members make statements about, potentially, there may be a criminal behaviour of certain individuals – is that acceptable?

Mr K Shanmugam: We do that in a number of situations when we say that people are being investigated, and I have given you a number of illustrations when we said, when we revealed that investigations are ongoing. When you say that investigations are ongoing, the implication with it is that, certainly, you are suspected by the Police. It happens.

Mr Leong did not think there was anything wrong with that statement being made about Mr Karl Liew. He did not think there was anything wrong about Mr Chew when we said that he had attempted to flee the jurisdiction. That was before he was charged. We do that. I would not say frequently but it has happened a number of times. And as I said, if you look at it, and if it is a question that is asked here or even outside, Police have released that information.

But nobody in their right minds will, therefore, think that either the Police or Members here are, therefore, saying that they have been found guilty. The only person who has made that statement without basis is Mr Leong, when he airily said they were actually guilty. I certainly will never say that.

But that does not mean that we cannot say so and so is being investigated. We have to look at the prejudice to the person, possible prejudice, and I have explained in my answer, why there was very little prejudice here, to disclose that they are being investigated.

Likewise, the fact that they have run out of jurisdiction – I mean if you want, we can keep saying each time they have run out of jurisdiction and escaped from the Police. We use a short-hand term: they have absconded. They say they are fugitives. What is the difference?

But did anybody say that they have been found guilty?

You do look at the prejudice that might be caused when you make statements; you need to be careful. But I explained in great detail why there is hardly any prejudice. In fact, no prejudice in this case.

Mr Speaker: Mr Leong.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, yes, I hope this is the last question.

So, I have actually said in my post, I would not have taken issue with the disclosure of names in the Lee Hsien Yang case if names of the individuals involved in the KOM case were also disclosed. So, that is the crux of the matter that I wanted to debate in this Parliament. As a result, with regard to the Karl Liew case, I take it as normal to disclose in this case, especially when the case became so big and all that.

But at that time, I did not know that the Government actually have two mouths. When it comes to the KOM case, it says "Oh no, we don't need to release the names". So, that gets me, wanted to clarify that in this Parliament.

Mr K Shanmugam: Sir, I have explained in some considerable detail the differences. Unless the Member has a specific query or disagrees with my explanation, I do not know how I can answer further. I mean, I have explained all the differences, why the case is different. In fact, his reason for saying that it is the same, one of which is completely false, and he has withdrawn it. So, if the Member has a specific reason for disagreeing with the differences I have pointed out, I would invite the Member not to make these allegations that people speak in this way or that way. Let us keep to the facts; do not be pejorative. Unless you can back it up.

Mr Speaker: Mr Leong.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, I thought I have always been backing up what I have said so far. I explained to you what I mean by muddying the water. I explained to you why I disagree with the inclusion of Karl Liew's example. That when Karl Liew's case came up, we have not gotten the KOM case.

And by the way, I want to make one clarification. In my post, I did not mention that the six individuals are guilty, but it is from my Parliamentary statement. So, they are two different things.

Mr Speaker: So, which is which? Did you say that the six of them are guilty or not? Whether one post or the other?

Mr K Shanmugam: Sir, he has withdrawn the allegation. And I did say – I think Member pays attention sometimes and he does not pay attention sometimes.

Mr Speaker: If I may, Mr Leong, did you withdraw your allegation on the six individuals? Just to be clear. I was not sure whether I have heard it.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, if Minister did not ask me, I suggest you do not ask me.

Mr Speaker: So, not to ask you that question? Ms Indranee.

2.54 pm

The Leader of the House (Ms Indranee Rajah): Mr Speaker, as Leader of the House, I would just like to remind Members to conduct themselves in a Parliamentary manner. And the tone in which we address one another is important. I would, therefore, ask Mr Leong to be mindful of that.

Mr K Shanmugam: Sir, I did say in my Statement that Mr Leong said this on 20 March, here. That is not in his Facebook post. And he withdrew that allegation, which is false, by saying he did not know the facts.

As for the others, one of the problems with having a discussion with Mr Leong is that: he talks about KOM, I have explained that, I have explained the differences between KOM and here. And then he says, "Oh, but I have backed up" and he goes on to other things.

Sir, on KOM, I have said what the differences are; and unless he can tell me which part he disagrees with, there is really nothing much more that I can say. And I suggest we leave at that, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Mr Leong.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, I think it is very difficult for public perception or for the public to understand; because I do not understand fully what the Minister had tried to explain about the differences between the two cases.

I think he raised, basically, three areas: public interest, prejudice and having absconded.

Sir, having absconded, that one we already dealt with in quite detail.

On public interest, I would think that the KOM case is just as significant in terms of public interest. If not, even more than the Lee Hsien Yang case. So, is that not a condition that the KOM individuals should be disclosed?

Secondly, about prejudice, the Minister also went to great length to show that there is no prejudice in the Lee Hsien Yang case. But many of us would think that there is even less likelihood of prejudice in the case of the KOM case, when the individuals have already been widely reported overseas.

So, that is the doubt that every Singaporean and the public of Singapore would have, although you may, technically explain some of the legal details here and there, but the public perception is something that we have to deal with in this House. That is why I disagree with what the Minister had explained between the KOM case and the Lee Hsien Yang case.

Mr Speaker: Minister.

Mr K Shanmugam: Sir, I said a little bit more than that. But for Mr Leong's and the Members' understanding – I had explained some detail the differences, he does not deal with all the differences.

But in the KOM case, the investigations had concluded. An assessment had been made that guilt could not be established beyond reasonable doubt in Court. No one was charged. To name the individuals who were investigated under these circumstances would be of prejudice to those individuals.

The harm associated with naming someone when charges would not be pursued, must be weighed. I would ask Mr Leong and Members to think about this carefully. Are we saying that in future, if we decide that a case cannot be made out against some persons who have been investigated, let us be clear, are we saying that if a case cannot be made out, we ought to release the names simply because some of their names had been in the media or other places, in some other place? Are we saying that?

Do Members really think it is right to accept the principle that simply because names have been published elsewhere, we proceed to release them here, even when the agencies have concluded that they cannot be prosecuted?

If Mr Leong is saying that, let me know; if that is the principle that you are suggesting?

This is a case, the KOM case, where the agencies have concluded, that they cannot proceed with the case.

Five individuals were named in the Brazilian court documents. But I do not know if Mr Leong knows this – they were not the defendants in that case. And as far as I am aware, no views were expressed by the court that they had engaged in wrongdoing.

And in these circumstances, the general policy of not disclosing the names of the individuals who had been investigated, applies. It applies to KOM, and it applies to anyone else. As I said, one person subsequently pleaded guilty in the US – the legal counsel. Then, you assess, do you release his name alone and not the others?

This is not a case of politicising these matters. If you apply it here, then you must be prepared that, in future, whenever some names have been leaked in the media elsewhere or whenever their names have been mentioned in some context, not as defendants, the court does not express an opinion, their names are mentioned by some witnesses, is Mr Leong arguing for the principle – and I would like to hear from him – that in all such cases, as long as the names are mentioned by someone and are public, then when we investigate, even when we conclude that there is no case, we ought to release the names?

Can I hear from him, through you, Sir?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, I think I am not going to answer that question. Because to and fro, we know what the Minister's stance is and the Government's stance is, that they are not going to release the names of the individuals. And we have talked about this —

Mr K Shanmugam: I am prepared to consider and ask Police to reconsider, if the Member says that is the principle and should apply to all future cases.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, that is not the principle I am asking.

Mr K Shanmugam: Thank you.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: But —

Mr K Shanmugam: Thank you. Now we know what the facts are.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: But I am saying that if these people in the KOM case have been widely publicised —

Mr K Shanmugam: Sir, point of order. The Member is repeating. I have asked him. I have put it on the table. If you say this is the principle, I will tell the Police, please consider releasing. He says that is not the principle.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Yes, that is not the principle.

Mr K Shanmugam: And rightly so, because it is very wrong for people's names to be released after the agencies have already concluded that they cannot be charged.

Sir, unless you are minded to allow a re-ventilation of matters that we have gone through over and over again, may I ask that that be treated as the end of my Statement? Unless Mr Leong has something new.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker —

Mr Speaker: Do you have a fresh perspective, Mr Leong?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Sorry?

Mr Speaker: Do you have a fresh perspective to add, rather than repeating the same points?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Yes, just one last statement. I agree with the Minister that we should not release the names, if the case is really closed. But we should also apply the same principle – that individuals who have not even been subject to court proceedings, why are you releasing their names? So, I want that principle to be upheld as well. Sir, that is what I am trying to say.

Mr K Shanmugam: Sir, that is why — so, now we put aside KOM. The Member agrees with me that the names ought not to be released. I thank him for that.

Let us move to the release of the names of Mr Lee Hsien Yang and Mrs Lee Suet Fern. It is exactly on all falls with the Parti Liyani case and the various other illustrations of disclosure. I would invite the Member to go and read carefully what I have said. There are situations when you release – and I have explained fully why it was released – and no Member had an issue with that, other than Mr Leong.

Mr Speaker: That is the end of it, Mr Leong. No, this is not for you to respond. I have some things to say. Can I just remind you, as illustrated, I have been more than tolerant, more than accommodative of you, on the various occasions for you to speak up. Can I remind you that, at the very least, let us retain the decorum of this Chamber in terms of whether you are addressing myself or other Members? Is that clear?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Yes, Speaker, I actually just want to —

Mr Speaker: You can sit down. Thank you.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Sorry, Speaker —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Clerk will now proceed to read —

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Sorry, Speaker —

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

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Speaker, actually, I want to extend an apology to you.

Mr Speaker: Mr Leong, yes?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: I actually want to extend an apology to you.

Mr Speaker: Well, in that case, quickly.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: But just before that, you said I was "silly" just now?

Mr Speaker: Sorry?

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Did you say I am trying to say something silly?

Mr Speaker: No.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: No? Oh, sorry about that. I apologise to you for what I have said just now, that regarding, if the Minister did not ask the question, please do not ask the question.

Mr Speaker: Noted.

3.06 pm

Mr Leong Mun Wai: I sincerely apologise to you.

SECOND READING BILL
RESOURCE SUSTAINABILITY (AMENDMENT) BILL

Resumption of Debate on Question [21 March 2023], "That the Bill be now read a Second time." — [Minister for Sustainability and the Environment].

Question again proposed.

Mr Speaker: Mr Louis Ng.

3.06 pm

Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang (Nee Soon): Sir, this Bill creates the law we need to impose a charge on disposable carrier bags, establish a beverage container return scheme and require building managers to segregate and report on food waste.

I have been speaking up for a charge on single-use carrier bags since 2016. I am glad we are finally debating this Bill in this House today. I support this Bill, as all the initiatives will encourage greener habits, reduce waste and extend the lifespan of our landfill at Pulau Semakau.

I have four points of clarification.

My first point is a point that I have been stressing repeatedly. It is on the expansion of the disposable carrier bag charge to more, if not all, retail businesses.

We currently only apply the charge to large supermarkets because they have the resources to implement it. I know we want to start small and slow and give time for the industry to adapt. But if we want to change mindsets and slash the use of single-use bags, we need to eventually expand the charge to all retail businesses.

Can the Senior Minister of State at least provide a five-year roadmap for the expansion of the disposable bag charge? A longer-term roadmap gives businesses time to adapt their business models and change their systems. With enough notice, some businesses may even pre-empt the rules and impose their own bag charge before the regulations come into force.

My second point is on applying the charge to online purchases. Increasingly common are "click and collect" purchases, where customers shop online and collect their products at a physical store. Since products are bought in advance, customers can make plans to bring their own reusable bags to collect their purchases.

Can the Senior Minister of State clarify if registered retailers must charge for carrier bags if customers only come to the store to pick up purchases that were made online? How will the charge be determined during check-out online?

Also, will the Senior Minister of State consider implementing the disposable bag charge for online deliveries? Grocery deliveries, in particular, are notorious for being packed in layers upon layers of disposable bags. Online grocers are eroding the market share of brick-and-mortar supermarkets and we should be looking at seriously reducing the waste they generate as well.

My third point is on the beverage container return scheme. Under the scheme, customers have to pay a small deposit for certain pre-packaged drinks, which will be refunded when they return the container for recycling. This will encourage consumers to return beverage containers and increase their recycling rate. However, this may erode the income of those who collect cans for a living. These individuals are often low-income and elderly. Can the Senior Minister of State share if we have studied how the scheme will impact their livelihoods? If so, what additional support will be extended to them?

My fourth and final point relates to the new requirement for building managers to report on food waste segregated and treated.

While treatment of food waste is a good way to reduce the impact of excess food, it would be even better if we can donate excess food instead. To encourage building managers to increase their efforts in implementing food donation programmes, will the Senior Minister of State consider requiring the reports to also include data on the amount of food donated?

I am glad that we are doing more to tackle food waste and I am glad to share that the Good Samaritans Committee is making good progress in drafting the Good Samaritans Food Donation Bill. This proposed law will help allay concerns about liability issues from the donation of food. It will help reduce food waste further and also provide food for the hungry. We are doing further consultations with stakeholders and I hope to introduce this Bill in Parliament through a Private Member's Bill soon.

Sir, notwithstanding my clarifications, I stand in support of the Bill.

Mr Speaker: Mr Gan Thiam Poh.

3.09 pm

Mr Gan Thiam Poh (Ang Mo Kio): Mr Speaker, Sir, for decades, sellers have been providing buyers with carrier bags free of charge. Obviously, the cost of the bags has already been priced in and bundled with the selling prices of the products for sale. With the implementation of the disposable carrier bag charge, how would the Ministry ensure that the participating businesses pass on the cost savings from the plastic bags to consumers?

I would also like to ask what would be the estimated amount of carbon reduction derived from the decreased production of bags, in addition to the environmental impact, especially the harm caused to marine life.

What is the possibility of getting supermarkets and other stores to switch to alternatives, such as biodegradable bags? Would the Ministry work with retailers and supermarkets to increase the availability of such bags?

As for beverage containers, I would like to ask how the Ministry will ensure that return points for the containers are easily accessible beyond supermarkets. I support making it compulsory for supermarkets to have collection points as many people buy their drinks from there. Would there be return points at coffee shops, hawker centres and food courts as well? I support the Bill.

Mr Speaker: Ms Joan Pereira.

3.11 pm

Ms Joan Pereira (Tanjong Pagar): Mr Speaker, Sir, I support the amendments in the Bill because it is a much-needed step towards a zero-waste Singapore. We need a comprehensive strategy to tackle plastic waste that also considers reasonable lifestyle changes for all Singapore residents. This is the only way to ensure that our efforts to tackle plastic bag problems will be sustainable over the long term.

One is the issue of proper bagging of waste, especially food waste, before disposal. If we do not provide reasonable alternatives, we are simply pushing the problem of people obtaining plastic bags from supermarkets to other sources. Many residents ask me how they can bag their rubbish going forward as they find five cents per bag pretty expensive. Surely, we do not want residents throwing their rubbish, especially food waste, directly into the rubbish chutes, in order to save on the cost of bags. Sir, in Mandarin.

(In Mandarin): [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] One challenge is the issue of the proper bagging of waste, especially food waste, before disposal.

If we do not provide a reasonable alternative, we are simply pushing the problem of people obtaining plastic bags from supermarkets to other sources. Many residents ask me how they can bag their rubbish going forward, as they find five cents per bag quite expensive.

Surely, we do not want residents throwing their rubbish, especially food waste, directly into the rubbish chutes, in order to save on the cost of bags.

(In English): Are there concerted efforts to support local-level composting or centralised food waste collection solutions? This will also help to close the food waste loop in Singapore, even for households. Will the Ministry be implementing initiatives similar to the Bloobox? Can we build on that?

Lastly, will the Ministry also support the adoption of biodegradable alternatives to plastic bags? Such products can be launched on a wide scale through supermarkets and wet markets.

Mr Speaker: Ms Carrie Tan.

3.13 pm

Ms Carrie Tan (Nee Soon): Mr Speaker, I commend MSE for tightening the regulations around carrier bags for brick-and-mortar retailers. Countries, such as Kenya, Rwanda and our neighbouring Thailand, have introduced stringent rules on the production and usage of plastic bags. Kenya, in particular, has implemented what has been called "the world's strictest plastic ban" and banned all single-use plastic bags throughout the country. Three years after they did so, some of their national parks began disallowing all single-use plastics on the premises. Although they did this primarily to tackle the littering problem, they have also successfully reduced plastic waste.

I hope that the measures this House is debating are merely the start towards our equally ambitious measures. Reducing use of plastic bags in brick-and-mortar businesses is an excellent start and I hope MSE can go beyond by also looking into the online retail space.

Since the pandemic, many more have been shopping online. In 2022, the Worldwide Fund for Nature Singapore found in their study that a total of 200,000 e-commerce parcels from various platforms are delivered across Singapore each day and this number is projected to grow by approximately 50% by 2025.

Merchants from e-commerce platforms are especially generous with their packaging, often using layers of bubble wrap and other materials. Sometimes, we find our items very small, but the boxes very big. Granted, retailers do so to ensure that products are delivered in good condition to their buyers and we can hardly fault them for that.

But there is a massive amount of packaging involved in these shipments and deliveries. Out of the 1.56 million tonnes of household waste generated in Singapore in 2018, approximately one-third was packaging. How does MSE plan to control the large amount of packaging used for online shopping deliveries?

It is heartening to know that some companies in the private sector are already initiating efforts to reduce and reuse packaging. Can the Government accelerate these efforts by introducing a "sustainable packaging" mark? This mark would indicate to online customers that the packaging used by merchants is either second-hand, compostable or otherwise recycled and, therefore, eco-friendly.

We can work with packaging companies and environmental groups to co-create the minimum sustainability standards that packaging materials should adhere to in order to earn this mark. We can also work with online retail aggregating platforms like Alibaba Express, Taobao, Lazada and Shopee to enrol online retail consumers to rate retailers on their packaging practices.

Such a mark will create collaboration between consumers and online retailers to achieve greener online shopping together. By exercising their purchasing choices in favor of retailers who use second-hand packaging, it will incentivise merchants to adopt less wasteful packaging practices.

In a study by Ipsos last year, 88% of Singaporeans said they were receptive to donating used packaging and 62% of Singaporeans said they were receptive to receiving their products in second-hand packaging – myself included. However, merchants are reluctant to adopt second-hand packaging due to the low cost and easy availability of packaging products – what we call "virgin packaging".

Hence, I believe we should make virgin packaging more costly and less accessible to compel merchants to reuse packaging more since their consumers are already receptive to it. This means that we should find ways to possibly tax the manufacturing, import and/or procurement of plastic or single-use packaging products to increase the cost to merchants such that it makes more economical sense to adopt greener packaging practices.

Some people may resist this as the concern is that merchants will transfer the cost to consumers. However, I do not necessarily see that as a bad thing as it will provide a disincentive for excessive shopping and make consumers more deliberative and conscious about what they are buying and to differentiate between things that are nice to have but not really necessary and reduce wasteful consumption as a whole.

If we were to implement these measures, the Government should work towards the necessary infrastructure enablement to ensure a coordinated system of localised facilities to collect and reuse packaging. It is important that we help merchants with changing their practices to make it as seamless and pain-free as we can.

I look forward also to further details on the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework that MSE announced in 2021. I support the Bill.

Mr Speaker: Mr Yip Hon Weng.

3.18 pm

Mr Yip Hon Weng (Yio Chu Kang): Mr Speaker, Sir, the proposed measures in this Bill are important steps towards a more sustainable Singapore. I have some clarifications on the proposed measures in the Bill.

First, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is important that the scheme to charge for disposable plastic bags has been carefully studied for implementation. To ensure the success of this policy, we should learn from the experiences of other countries that have implemented similar policies.

What are some of the challenges that they have faced? What are the key lessons that we can learn from them?

I have received feedback from residents who questioned the need to discourage the use of plastic bags at supermarkets. Many Members have also spoken about this. They argue that these bags are often reused by households to bag rubbish. They have expressed concern that discouraging plastic bag use may result in food waste being thrown directly down rubbish chutes. This leads to other environmental issues, such as the breeding of pests.

Are there plans in place to monitor this situation? Will there be increased enforcement of regulations targeting the failure to properly bag rubbish for disposal?

The Ministry has assured that the public will continue to have access to disposable bags from other sources. This includes those available for bagging fresh produce from supermarkets. Hence, it should not hinder the practice of responsible waste disposal. Even so, this could lead residents to exploit such loopholes by taking extra bags.

Some residents have also shared that since plastic is incinerated in Singapore, their remains take up less space in landfills than other types of waste. They felt that the resources spent on discouraging the use of plastic bags could be better spent on managing other types of waste instead.

How has the Ministry factored in these perspectives in the implementation of the plastic bag charge?

Moreover, while the plastic bag charge is a positive step, it should not be viewed as the ultimate solution. Consumers might start purchasing single-use plastic bags from online and overseas retailers, where they are usually more affordable in bulk.

How will the Ministry tackle this problem and ensure that we are not simply redirecting residents to another source of plastic bags that cannot be recycled? This may cause our residents to pay more and not solve the problem. Will this not impact our less well-off residents?

Another concern regarding the plastic bag charge is that retailers may use their voluntary participation in the scheme as an excuse to incorporate the cost into the prices of their products. In doing so, they continue to give out plastic bags without offering consumers a choice.

This would make it difficult for consumers to know that they are paying for the bags as the charge would be factored into the total bill.

Whilst this may be small and insignificant when compared to the overall cost of the sales, this may constitute profiteering, especially for those who may have brought their own bags.

How will the Ministry ensure that retailers are transparent about the plastic bag charge and that consumers are fully informed about a retailer's plastic bag policy?

It is critical to grant all consumers the freedom to make choices about plastic bag use to achieve the policy's objective. Otherwise, some businesses may take advantage of the situation. Ultimately, consumers will bear the losses.

This brings me to my next point. Is the 5-cent charge per plastic bag enough to discourage consumption or should we consider charging more? In fact, some retailers are already charging 10 cents per bag.

I understand that supermarkets will be required to publish information on how the proceeds from the sale of plastic bags would be used for charitable or other environmental causes. Are there existing guidelines as to what constitutes proper use of the funds?

Next, we should also consider expanding the plastic bag charge to cover all single-use disposable plastic items. My colleagues and I have raised concerns about the environmental impact of such items in Parliament before and I have asked about the measures to reduce their use by enterprises. With meetings, gatherings and events resuming in full force, disposable cutlery, plates and cups are, once again, being used at these occasions.

For individuals, many F&B retailers are already charging for takeaways with disposable containers and single-use cutlery. Therefore, a mandatory charge for disposable items would not be a new concept.

I am of the view that charging for single-use plastic bags is the right step forward as we should discourage waste. Perhaps, when we, as a society, better understand the detrimental impact of plastic pollution on our health and the environment, we may consider a complete ban on single-use plastics as momentary convenience may lead to prolonged harm on our health and on the environment.

Second, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to raise some concerns regarding the beverage container return scheme.

Will this scheme have an impact on karang gunis and waste collectors in the industry since metal cans and plastic bottles are still sought after? Are there any potential disruptions in the waste management industry that need to be addressed, especially for elderly waste collectors who rely on collecting recyclables to supplement their income?

Could the Ministry mandate the establishment of beverage container return points in the community and in public areas instead of leaving it as a voluntary initiative? It seems reasonable to assume that these return points would be more heavily used, given that many consumers would purchase their beverages online or from heartland retailers, vending machines and supermarkets.

If not, how does the Ministry plan to monitor demand and increase the number of return points if existing ones prove to be insufficient?

Additionally, how does the scheme take into consideration the needs of seniors and those with mobility limitations who may find it inconvenient to return beverage containers? These individuals would have to incur the extra costs of beverages but may be unable to return the beverage containers for a refund of their deposits.

What measures are in place to engage the public and ensure a high level of awareness and participation rates, particularly during the initial stages of implementation? Will the campaign be promoted in schools and at community events? Will there be publicity materials in stores and public areas reminding and instructing consumers to utilise the return points?

Third, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have some questions regarding the food waste management scheme.

Is the Ministry considering expanding the scheme to cover other types of buildings and premises besides industrial and commercial buildings? Locations which come to mind are the SAF cookhouses. Other potential sites may include schools, hospitals and nursing homes.

With on-site classes returning in full force, have there been any recent studies conducted on the amount of food waste generated in these premises? This may serve as an opportunity to raise awareness among NS recruits and students about the importance of not wasting food. It is important to start educating individuals from a young age.

I note that under current provisions, new buildings must treat food waste on-site. However, with approval from NEA, building managers of new buildings may seek alternative food waste treatment methods located off-site.

Are these off-site facilities designated by NEA? What are the requirements and what is the proximity amongst them? If so, how does the Ministry define whether an off-site facility is adequately close to the buildings to ensure efficient and safe transportation of food waste?

In conclusion, Mr Speaker, Sir, these initiatives are a step in the right direction towards promoting responsible consumption and changing mindsets in the long term.

Pursuing these initiatives is, ultimately, about balancing business costs and sustainability efforts. Nonetheless, this does not need to be a zero-sum game. More innovative solutions and technology must be explored to make going green less costly and reduce the associated overheads.

Most importantly, we should endeavour not to have waste at all. We must embrace a culture that minimises waste or, even better, no waste, and practises consumption in moderation.

This cannot be the sole responsibility of the Government. Rather, it must be a collective effort of every individual and organisation to make a significant impact on our environment.

A New England proverb puts it most succinctly on how we can do so, "Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without."

By doing this, we can achieve a greener and more sustainable Singapore for every one. I support the Bill.

Mr Speaker: Mr Don Wee.

3.27 pm

Mr Don Wee (Chua Chu Kang): Mr Speaker, Sir, I rise in support of the Bill, which seeks to reduce packaging and food waste.

Consumers and SMEs are, understandably, concerned about higher costs as a result of the new legislation. Allow me to share some of their specific queries.

Supermarket outlets whose operators have an annual turnover of more than \$100 million will be required to impose the minimum 5-cent charge per carrier bag for purchases made. Does this charge apply to convenience stores like Cheers and 7-Eleven, which are related to the NTUC Fairprice and Dairy Farm groups respectively?

May I clarify, for online orders of groceries by these supermarkets, would the charge also apply to the deliveries made? Mr Speaker, Sir, in Mandarin.

(In Mandarin): [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] About 80% of our residents' households live in HDB and about 16% in condominiums. It is a habit for Singaporeans to put their rubbish into plastic bags before throwing them down the rubbish chutes.

I am concerned that residents will proceed to buy more plastic bags, which may be cheaper than five cents per piece if they buy in bulk. Unfortunately, there seems to be no better material than plastic to bag wet and perishable products.

(In English): I am also concerned that reusable plastic bags, which shoppers are encouraged to bring along, may not be environmentally friendlier if the frequency of usage is low.

Next, regarding the beverage container return scheme, does the scheme operator have the flexibility or room to exercise creativity to entice consumers to recycle plastic bottles and metal cans, such as by refunding the deposits and topping up in the form of supermarket vouchers, in the event the scheme operators are partnering the supermarket chains, which have a better network of outreach so as to improve the recycling rate?

Would the Minister share what is the average return rate in other countries which had introduced this scheme earlier than Singapore?

I would also like to ask how much space does a single returning point take up, and what would be the estimated monthly cost to operate a returning point? How will the Ministry ascertain the success of this scheme? Will the scheme be funded by taxpayers' money? Are there any Government grants that the beverage producers can tap upon to minimise producer fees which may be passed on to consumers eventually?

I am worried that consumers will likely end up paying more if the recycled material value is lower than the cost of joining and complying with the licensed scheme. The other concern would be over people fighting over used metal cans and plastic bottles at F&B joints or rubbish collection points.

Finally, I have some questions about food waste reporting.

I would like to ask about food manufacturers which also have food catering businesses. May I propose that the food caterers be required to report the leftover food items brought back to their factories as food waste too? Would the Ministry consider penalising food caterers who dump the food waste at clients' places instead of bringing it back to the factories? Are food waste generators required to report the amount of food waste periodically? What are the disclosure requirements?

Mr Speaker: Senior Minister of State Amy Khor.

3.31 pm

The Senior Minister of State for Sustainability and the Environment (Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am happy that Members from both sides of the House have expressed support on the initiatives proposed in this Bill. Let me address Members' thoughtful comments and suggestions.

First, the disposable carrier bag charge or "bag charge". I am glad that many Members have expressed support for the bag charge, including Mr Dennis Tan and Mr Louis Ng. Indeed, many Members, including Miss Cheng Li Hui, former Member of Parliament, Er Dr Lee Bee Wah as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like Zero Waste SG and WWF Singapore have also called for a charge on disposable bags. Mr Louis Ng, as he noted, has been speaking up about a charge since 2016 and I commend him for his persistence.

We heard these calls. The Government has been studying the experiences of other jurisdictions that have implemented a bag charge. We are also mindful of our local circumstances, where plastic bags are widely used by households to dispose of waste hygienically and where incinerable waste is not directly landfilled. We convened the Citizens' Workgroup in 2020 to tap into diverse views and insights to address the issues of disposables. After we accepted the recommendation to implement a disposable carrier bag charge, we consulted widely to hear different considerations, seek feedback and build collective support.

I am glad that Mr Dennis Tan agrees that it is the excessive use of disposables that we need to tackle. By placing a visible cost on each bag, we will be more sensitive to the impact of our consumption on the environment.

While Ms Joan Pereira raised concerns about cost, Mr Yip Hon Weng asked if we should consider charging more to discourage consumption. Indeed, we need to strike a careful balance between creating an effective behavioural nudge and managing the cost impact on households.

Compared to other retail establishments, shoppers tend to make larger purchases at supermarkets and may have to purchase more bags if they forget or do not bring enough reusable bags. We have therefore set the bag charge at a minimum of five cents and most covered supermarket operators will be charging five cents per bag when the bag charge comes into effect. The bag charge can be avoided by bringing our own bags. We all have to play our part for the environment.

Mr Yip Hon Weng and Mr Shawn Huang asked about the use of proceeds from the bag charge. Covered supermarket operators have flexibility to decide on the use of proceeds but will need to account to the public for how they were used. Our approach to mandate annual declarations on the use of proceeds ensures that there is transparency and public accountability, while minimising regulatory and compliance costs. I am heartened that all the supermarket operators have indicated that they intend to use the proceeds to support environmental and social causes.

Mr Louis Ng and Mr Dennis Tan asked about expansion plans for the bag charge. We will monitor the effectiveness of the bag charge and assess the need to expand coverage. For example, will we observe new behavioural norms where bringing your own bag for shopping becomes second nature? Will more retailers follow suit to voluntarily charge for disposable carrier bags? We can learn from the experience of other jurisdictions such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and England, which have taken a phased approach in extending the coverage of the bag charge over time.

Mr Don Wee asked if the bag charge would apply to convenience stores. As I said in my opening speech, operators of Singapore Food Agency (SFA)-licensed supermarkets with an annual turnover of more than \$100 million will be required to charge for disposable carrier bags at their SFA-licensed supermarket outlets. Convenience stores, such as those operated by Cheers and 7-Eleven that do not sell or prepare raw meats, poultry or seafood, are not required to have supermarket licences and hence do not come under this legislation. Nonetheless, I note that Cheers and 7-Eleven are already charging for disposable carrier bags voluntarily.

Members have raised clarifications about online grocery purchases. We will prescribe in the subsidiary legislation that the bag charge will not apply to disposable carrier bags used by retailers to bag groceries that are purchased online and delivered to the customer. This is because customers do not have the choice of using their own bags.

Nevertheless, we agree with Ms Carrie Tan that there is scope for online retailers and platforms, not just supermarkets, to reduce packaging waste. We will study how best to address packaging waste from e-commerce, including online grocery shopping, as we develop the extended producer responsibility scheme for packaging waste management. In the meantime, we will work with the supermarket operators to compile best practices and develop guidelines on reducing packaging for online purchases. We also encourage other retailers to pursue initiatives to reduce and reuse delivery packaging.

To Mr Shawn Huang's question on annual turnover, this will be determined at the entity level and will not be aggregated at the group level. We will monitor the implementation of the bag charge and assess if there is a need to adjust how annual turnover is determined in the future.

On Mr Yip Hon Weng and Ms Joan Pereira's concerns about responsible waste disposal, I would like to reiterate that the practice of properly bagging waste before disposing of it in rubbish chutes should still continue. We are not imposing a ban on disposable carrier bags. They will still be available. Other packaging such as the bags that hold bread or toilet rolls can also be used to bag waste as alternatives to supermarket carrier bags.

The bag charge should not be an excuse to dispose of waste in an irresponsible manner. Mr Yip Hon Weng and Mr Don Wee commented that with the bag charge, consumers might start purchasing single-use plastic bags from online and overseas retailers in bulk. While this is possible, these consumers would likely only buy what they really need and be more mindful of how they use the bags, since they would also have to pay for them.

Members like Ms Poh Li San and Mr Dennis Tan spoke about the importance of public education to promote greater understanding of the value of sustainability and effect positive behavioural change. I agree with this. Our nationwide "Say YES to Waste Less" campaign has been ongoing since 2019. As part of the campaign, we work with many partners including supermarkets and F&B establishments to amplify the message of sustainable living and encourage action through initiatives and incentives.

The campaign aims to help Singaporeans better appreciate why we need to reduce the use of disposables and food wastage and how to do so. The campaign messages are shared across multiple touch points and languages to cater to the wider population. The Government plans to increase public education in conjunction with the commencement of the bag charge.

In the lead-up to 3 July, we will ramp up public awareness efforts together with the supermarket operators. We will remind the public to bring their own bags to avoid the bag charge and offer suggestions on alternatives to supermarket carrier bags for bagging waste. We are also encouraging the supermarket operators to carry out initiatives to support the transition from disposable to reusable bags, such as bring-your-own-bag initiatives and the distribution of reusable carrier bags especially to lower-income groups.

In the spirit of environmental stewardship, I urge everyone to be mindful not to take more disposable bags than necessary and start bringing our own bags, even before the bag charge commences.

Let me now address the beverage container return scheme. The scheme has seen good results overseas. To Mr Don Wee's question, similar schemes in countries such as Norway, Sweden and Lithuania have consistently achieved return rates of 80% or higher.

Mr Yip Hon Weng, Mr Dennis Tan and Mr Gan Thiam Poh have asked about the return point network. Setting up a convenient return point network is a top priority, because it is crucial to the scheme's success. The mandated return points in larger supermarkets will form an important part of the network. At other community spaces and public areas, NEA will work with the scheme operator to encourage premises operators to voluntarily set up return points. Based on the experience overseas, setting up a return point can increase footfall to stores. The scheme operator will also pay handling fees to return point operators as part of the commercial arrangement, to reimburse costs incurred.

The scheme operator will be setting up return points at locations based on considerations such as footfall and proximity of return points. The Government will also exercise oversight via licensing conditions to ensure a robust network of return points for the public to return beverage containers conveniently.

Mr Don Wee asked about the space taken up by a return point. This would depend on whether the premises operator opts for an over-the-counter return point, or a reverse vending machine. Reverse vending machines, or RVMs, range in size, with smaller machines requiring around 0.6 square metres of space and larger ones with higher capacities requiring up to three square meters. Premises operators may work with the scheme operator to determine the optimal RVM size for their premises.

Mr Don Wee asked whether the scheme operator can exercise creativity in boosting recycling rates, such as by offering supermarket vouchers. Return point operators would need to provide a full refund of the deposit amount when the covered beverage container is returned. As highlighted in my opening speech, the 10-cent deposit has been set to provide the necessary behavioural nudge to achieve the desired return rates. That said, we will certainly encourage the scheme operator to work with stakeholders such as return point operators to explore innovative ways to boost return rates.

For example, in addition to the cash option, they could create different options for refund, including supermarket vouchers, rewards points, or donation to charity. We see such practices in overseas jurisdictions too. For example, in Australia, consumers are given the option to donate their refunds directly to charity. Beyond this, return point operators may also work with the scheme operator on further promotional initiatives to increase footfall to their stores, if they wish to.

Mr Don Wee asked how the scheme is funded. This is an Extended Producer Responsibility, or EPR, scheme, where producers are responsible for the collection and recycling of their products. As such, the scheme would be financed by producers, that is, the covered beverage importers and manufacturers. Producers will pay producer fees to the scheme operator to carry out these responsibilities on their behalf.

These fees would be proportional to the beverages they put out to the market. The revenue from the sale of clean, high-quality and high-value recyclables will be utilised by the scheme operator to reduce the scheme costs. The eventual cost pass-through to consumers in beverage prices, if any, will likely be moderated by price competition among industry players. This is also the experience in other countries that have implemented similar schemes.

I appreciate that business costs are a concern. We have also heard this feedback at our consultations with companies. At the same time, many have also expressed their support for this scheme, recognising the importance of sustainability.

We do need to balance cost and environmental considerations, especially in this uncertain economic environment. Therefore, we have taken a consultative and pragmatic approach in developing the scheme.

First, as outlined in my opening speech, we hope to establish an industry-led scheme operator, which is a good practice that we see in jurisdictions overseas. It will have a strong incentive to operate efficiently. It will also be able to tap on the industry's capabilities and resources to improve operational synergies, such as using existing logistics channels to make backhaul trips.

Second, we will continue to support the industry and provide sufficient time for implementation.

In my opening speech, I spoke about how we are adjusting the timeline to implement the scheme based on the industry's feedback. We have also supported the industry with knowledge and capability building. We organised an industry workshop last year and invited an overseas scheme operator to share best practices. We will continue to convene and facilitate discussions and knowledge sharing amongst industry stakeholders.

Third, where possible, we will provide operational flexibility for companies to decide on arrangements that are more cost-effective. For example, producers could consider using stickers for the barcodes and deposit marks or to directly print them on the beverage container.

Mr Shawn Huang asked about the scenario where the scheme operator fails to meet the return rate target. We place great importance on ensuring that the scheme operator meets the return rate target. I mentioned in my opening speech that we will have a specific and higher financial penalty for missing the target for the beverage container return scheme.

However, we want to avoid this outcome as much as possible. We will support the scheme operator on key scheme aspects that contribute to achieving the return rate, such as public education efforts and deploying a robust return point network.

Mr Yip Hon Weng asked about measures to raise awareness and participation. Indeed, this is a key area of work that we will partner the scheme operator on. We will need to reach out to all segments of society, as Mr Yip described, and spread the message in our communities. We want to bring everyone on board to do their part for sustainability.

Mr Yip Hon Weng, Mr Louis Ng and Ms Poh Li San have raised questions and suggestions about the scheme in relation to the broader waste collection industry, including informal waste collectors such as karang guni. NEA will work with the scheme operator on appropriate measures to cater to them.

For example, the scheme operator could deploy return depots to accept beverage container returns in bulk, similar to arrangements made in other jurisdictions to involve the informal sector in the collection network.

Even as we seek to deploy a network of accessible return points to make returning beverage containers as convenient as possible, we recognise that the elderly and less mobile residents may find it more challenging, as Mr Yip Hon Weng highlighted.

We want to design a scheme where everyone can participate. We will continue to seek out ideas from the community, such as students and community groups, on how we can encourage community support and involvement to make the scheme more accessible to less mobile residents. NEA will work closely with the scheme operator to make the scheme work for these members of our community.

I am glad that Mr Dennis Tan is supportive of the scheme and is even calling for the expansion of the scope to glass bottles and beverage cartons.

We are, first, targeting plastic bottles and metal cans because they are easy to collect, compactible and have high material value. They also comprise about 70% of beverage containers put to market. Including glass bottles or beverage cartons would add complexity and cost to collection logistics and infrastructure. They will continue to be recycled under the National Recycling Programme after the scheme begins. We will monitor the scheme closely and assess the need to expand coverage, if necessary, or to include them in future phases of the wider EPR scheme for packaging.

Mr Shawn Huang asked how the scheme would work for cross-border commercial activities, such as food and beverage services onboard aircrafts and ships. There are varying circumstances in how the beverages are supplied to aircraft and ships, as well as where the beverage containers are then disposed of. NEA has been engaging the industry to develop suitable arrangements for such activities.

Finally, on the new food waste reporting requirements.

Mr Yip Hon Weng asked if we would consider requiring other types of buildings, such as SAF cookhouses, schools and hospitals, to segregate food waste for treatment and submit reports.

Under GreenGov.SG, public sector buildings with food and beverage or F&B establishments will segregate the food waste for on-site or off-site treatment from 2024. This will include SAF cookhouses, schools and public hospitals.

Some public sector buildings have already done so. For instance, several polytechnics have introduced food waste segregation measures and installed on-site food waste digesters at F&B areas within their premises. For non-public sector buildings, we will explore extending the segregation and reporting requirements to more types of buildings over time.

Mr Yip Hon Weng and Mr Shawn Huang asked about off-site food waste treatment for new buildings.

NEA will not determine which off-site treatment facility building managers should send their food waste to. Building managers can determine this based on their business considerations and submit their proposal for NEA's approval. Our intent is to encourage higher value-added processes, such as valorising food by-products into animal feed ingredients or even food products. More details on the approval criteria will be provided when ready. The food waste must be transported by licensed general waste collectors in a manner that safeguards public health.

Mr Don Wee suggested that food caterers should take back leftover food from their clients' events for segregation and reporting. He asked if we would consider imposing penalties on those who dispose of the food waste at the clients' premises.

It is primarily the consumers' responsibility to avoid food wastage by ordering just enough food for their guests. We encourage everyone to adopt such sustainable practices to minimise food waste from catering events.

Mr Don Wee asked about food waste reporting requirements and frequency. To minimise compliance burden, we will only require key data to be submitted annually, such as the building-level tonnages.

Mr Louis Ng asked if we would consider requiring food donation amounts to be reported. We will not require this as donated food is not food waste. We agree that donating excess food which is safe for consumption will reduce the amount of food waste, and the latter will be reported.

Regarding the Good Samaritan Food Donation Bill, MSE, with MCCY and MSF, will continue to work closely with Mr Ng's team on this.

Ms Joan Pereira asked if there is any support provided for community food waste collection and composting solutions to close the food waste loop for households. Ms Pereira will be glad to know that the SG Eco Fund has supported many such initiatives in the community, such as food waste collection drives, composting and gardening workshops, as well as initiatives that mobilise residents to bring their food waste to a central collection point to be turned into compost for their local community gardens.

Under the Green Action for Communities movement, we are hearing good ideas from residents, including on handling food waste. MSE and Green Plan agencies will work with residents to bring these ideas to fruition.

Let me conclude. The proposed changes set out in this Bill represent our next steps in this journey towards zero waste and a circular economy. In particular, the beverage container return scheme and disposable carrier bag charge will require individuals to adjust their daily lives and their daily habits.

Life-as-usual and business-as-usual cannot continue if we are to responsibly steward our resources and environment. Each of us has a responsibility to reduce carbon emissions, conserve Semakau Landfill and enhance resource resiliency. By reducing waste and recycling right, we can do our part to combat climate change and ensure that Singapore remains clean, green and liveable.

I call on all Members of the House to give our support to this Bill. Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move.

3.55 pm

Mr Speaker: Clarifications. Mr Dennis Tan.

Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong (Hougang): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Just one clarification for Senior Minister of State Amy Khor. As we know, the plastic bag charge scheme will start with the larger supermarkets with an annual turnover of more than \$100 million.

I just wanted to ask for the Government's position on the retailers who are not currently covered by this \$100 million point. If they would voluntarily want to impose a plastic bag charge and if, for example, they are going to charge more than what the supermarkets are going to charge, what is the Government's position on this and what is the recourse that Singaporeans may have if they feel that this may come up and this may amount to profiteering or something like that?

Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan: Currently, there are already retailers who are voluntarily charging for bags and the bag charge actually varies. So, really, this is a commercial decision. It is also part of their sustainability drive if they are into this, and we will leave it to them, and the consumers have a choice of whether to patronise these retailers.

What we have done is for the covered supermarkets, we have mandated a charge of at least five cents and, as I have said, most of the supermarkets that are covered will be charging five cents per bag. For us, we have mandated a low charge of five cents because we are also cognisant of the fact that most people get their disposable bags from the supermarket and if they shop in supermarkets, they tend to require more bags and, if they forget to bring their reusable bag, then they will have to pay for that.

Mr Speaker: Any other clarifications? Okay.

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 Amy Khor Lean Suan].

Bill considered in Committee; reported without amendment; read a Third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, "That Parliament do now adjourn to a date to be fixed." – [Ms Indranee Rajah].

Adjourned accordingly at 4.00 pm.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

SIGNS TO ALERT CYCLISTS AT SMART TRAFFIC LIGHT JUNCTIONS

1 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for Transport whether the Ministry will consider putting signs at smart traffic lights where the CoopeRative and UnIfied Smart Traffic SystEm (CRUISE) project is in operation to ensure that cyclists are aware that they may not be detected by traffic light systems and may need to dismount to use pedestrian crossings instead.

Mr S Iswaran: Pedestrian crossings with CoopeRative and UnIfied Smart Traffic SystEm (CRUISE) are no different from other typical crossings. Cyclists and pedestrians can continue to use them the same way by activating the green man light with the push buttons installed on traffic light poles. Cyclists are not required to dismount at pedestrian crossings but are required to slow down, stop and look out for oncoming traffic before crossing.

SINGAPOREANS DIAGNOSED WITH RARE DISEASES AND COVERAGE BY RARE DISEASE FUND

2 **Mr Chua Kheng Wee Louis** asked the Minister for Health (a) what is the number of Singaporeans currently diagnosed with rare diseases; (b) what is the percentage of such Singaporeans with rare diseases which are covered by the Rare Disease Fund (RDF); (c) how does the RDF move from covering medicines used to treat the initial three rare diseases to the current five; and (d) whether the RDF can move from covering medicines to treat conditions to cover rare diseases instead.

Mr Ong Ye Kung: An estimated 2,000 to 3,000 people are afflicted with chronic rare diseases in Singapore. For the majority of this population, our national healthcare financing schemes, such as MediSave, MediShield Life and subsidies, provide financial assistance for treatments that this group of patients may require. Patients who face difficulty in affording their bills can also apply for MediFund through the public health institutions. For a small percentage, additional financial assistance may be required. The Rare Disease Fund (RDF) was set up to support high-cost medications for this group. Since its establishment in 2019, RDF has supported nine patients, which represents about 0.4% of Singaporeans with rare diseases.

Given the limited size of the RDF, funding support is focused on treatments for rare conditions that are life-threatening and where the treatment is effective in extending the patient's lifespan. RDF lists new medications when it is able to attract donations to generate sufficient investment income to support patients who would, typically, require the medicines on a lifelong basis. Since its inception, RDF has expanded its funding support to cover seven medications for five conditions. RDF will continue to raise more donations and explore the coverage of more rare disease conditions. Donations attract three-for-one Government matching and enjoy tax deduction of 2.5 times the donation amount.

LIFE EXPECTANCY OF SINGAPOREANS DIAGNOSED WITH RARE DISEASES

3 **Mr Chua Kheng Wee Louis** asked the Minister for Health in each year over the last 10 years (a) what is the number of Singaporeans who are newly diagnosed with rare diseases; and (b) what is the average life expectancy of such patients with rare diseases.

Mr Ong Ye Kung: Rare diseases cover a broad spectrum of conditions. The Ministry of Health does not track the incident number of Singaporeans who are newly diagnosed with rare diseases or the life expectancy of patients with these diseases.

SINGAPOREANS DIAGNOSED WITH SPINAL MUSCULAR ATROPHY AND COST OF TREATMENT

4 **Mr Chua Kheng Wee Louis** asked the Minister for Health (a) what is the number of Singaporeans currently diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA); (b) what are the currently approved treatment options for SMA; and (c) what is the average cost of such treatments before and after any applicable Government subsidies.

Mr Ong Ye Kung: There are, currently, about 40 to 50 persons in Singapore diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA). Risdiplam is the only treatment option registered with and approved by the Health Sciences Authority. It costs around \$375,000 a year in our public healthcare institutions.

PREScription COSTS FOR EVRYSdi FOR SPINAL MUSCULAR ATROPHY

5 **Mr Chua Kheng Wee Louis** asked the Minister for Health (a) what is the breakdown of the yearly prescription costs for Evrysdi for the treatment of spinal muscular atrophy in Singapore; (b) what is the range of prices charged for Evrysdi in countries where the use of the drug is approved; and (c) what is the mechanism by which the pricing of such drugs is regulated in Singapore.

Mr Ong Ye Kung: The drug risdiplam, sold under the brand name Evrysdi, is an oral medicine registered with the Health Sciences Authority for the treatment of spinal muscular atrophy (SMA).

The average yearly cost of risdiplam in Singapore is about S\$375,000, compared to published prices ranging from S\$260,000 to S\$390,000 in some countries.

The Ministry of Health does not regulate drug prices in private hospitals. However, for public health institutions (PHIs), the Agency for Care Effectiveness (ACE) conducts value-based pricing negotiations with pharmaceutical companies, to ensure that prices are commensurate with the outcomes they deliver for patients and PHIs' charges would cover some operations and overhead costs.

EXPENDITURE ON AND UTILISATION OF NATIONAL ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD SYSTEM

6 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for Health (a) what is the total expenditure on the National Electronic Health Record (NEHR) system over the last 15 years; (b) what is the percentage of private licensees in 2022 in ambulatory care, such as general practitioners, specialists and dentists, who (i) review NEHR data and (ii) review and upload NEHR data; and (c) what is the percentage of recipients of the Early Contribution Incentive Scheme in 2022 who (i) review NEHR data and (ii) review and upload NEHR data.

Mr Ong Ye Kung: The National Electronic Health Record (NEHR) was established in 2011, and has gone through many rounds of updates and improvements. It is a major national healthcare record system, to capture the updated summary medical records of all patients in Singapore. To date, the total expenditure on the system is around \$660 million.

As of 31 December 2022, over 90% of licensed private hospitals and nursing homes have view-access to NEHR; of these, close to half of them are contributing data. Over 30% of licensed private ambulatory care institutions, which include general practitioners (GPs), specialists, dentists and renal care providers, have view-access to NEHR; of these, 12% are contributing data.

With the proposed Health Information Bill, all licensed healthcare service providers are required to contribute data.

In the meantime, the Early Contribution Incentive (ECI) supports private healthcare licensees in contributing data to the NEHR. Among the 12 laboratories that applied for ECI, four have received the grant.

The ECI scheme was extended in December 2022 to GPs, private hospitals, radiological laboratories and clinical laboratories, and we have received more than 900 applications thus far. Those taking up ECI are required to contribute to the NEHR and will be given NEHR view-access.

REQUIREMENT FOR PERFORMING ARTISTE HOLDING WORK PERMIT TO ATTEND SETTLING-IN PROGRAMME

7 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for Manpower whether the Ministry will consider requiring a holder of Work Permit for performing artiste to attend a Settling-in Programme (SIP), similar to the SIP currently conducted for migrant domestic workers and Work Permit holders from certain sectors.

Dr Tan See Leng: Non-Malaysian Work Permit holders in the construction, manufacturing, marine shipyard and process sectors as well as migrant domestic workers attend the Settling-in-Programme (SIP). The Ministry of Manpower will review this from time to time, but has no plans currently to extend it.

ANNEXES

Annex 1()

Annex 2()

Annex 3()

VERNACULAR SPEECHES

Vernacular Speech by Ms Joan Pereira()

Vernacular Speech by Mr Don Wee()