Functions and Roles of Government in Working for the Good of Society

Government in A Representative Democracy

A **government** is a set of institutions by which a society is ruled. Many countries form a type of government called a **democracy.** Democracy means rule of the people, which refers to the ability of citizens to participate in political decision-making.

One of the forms of democracy is a **representative democracy,** in which citizens elect representatives to form a government to make decisions on their behalf. However, a government in a representative democracy does not have unlimited power to make decisions or carry out **policies.** It is required to act according to the country's constitution.

General Elections in Singapore

- **Issuance of the Writ of Election**
  - The Writ of Election signals the start of the election period.
  - The President, on the advice of the Prime Minister, dissolves the Parliament and issues the Writ of Election.
  - The Writ of Election is a public document that specifies the date when the nomination of candidates is to be taken and the place of nomination.
- **Five days to a month later: Nomination Day**
  - Aspiring candidates file their nomination papers and make an election deposit within the nomination period between 11 am and 12 noon.
  - If there is more than one eligible candidate for a constituency, a contest is declared.
  - If there is no contest, the unopposed candidate will be elected by default. This is also known as a walkover.

- **Campaigning**
  - Candidates can begin campaigning immediately after a contest has been declared.
  - With the appropriate license or permit, candidates may visit homes; distribute pamphlets, handouts and newsletters; display posters and banners; use private vehicles for election advertising purposes; and advertise on the Internet.
- **Cooling-off Day**
  - Cooling-off Day is a day for voters to reflect on the issues in a rational manner.
  - No new advertising or campaigning is allowed.
- **Polling Day**
  - Voting is compulsory in Singapore for all citizens aged 21 and above.
  - Polling day is, by law, a public holiday.
  - All voters cast their votes. Polls usually close at 8 pm.
  - No campaigning is allowed, though the candidates may inspect the polling stations.
- **Counting of The Votes**
  - At the counting centres, all the ballot papers from different boxes are mixed.
  - Votes are counted in the presence of the candidates or their counting agents.

Functions of Government

The Singapore government serves three main functions:

- **Legislature:** To make and pass laws
- **Executive:** To implement and enforce laws
- **Judiciary:** To interpret and apply laws.

Legislature

The **Legislature** performs the government function of **making and passing laws.** It consists of the President and Parliament.

Composition	President, Parliament
Function	Makes and passes laws

Before a law is passed, the draft, which is called a bill, is debated in Parliament. All bills must receive the President's agreement to become part of the law in Singapore. The President may not agree to certain bills at his or her discretion.

How a Bill Becomes Law

- **First Reading**
  - The bill is formally introduced in Parliament. There is no debate at this stage.
    Second Reading
  - Members debate the general principles and merits of the bill. They then vote on whether the bill should proceed to the next stage.

- **Committee Stage**
  - Details of the proposed law are examined. Changes to certain provisions can be proposed.

- **Third Reading**
  - Principles behind the bill can no longer be questioned. The bill is then voted on.

- **Scrutiny for the Presidential Council for Minority Rights**
  - This ensures the bill does not discriminate against any racial or religious minority.

- **President's Assent**
  - The President agrees to the passing of the bill as law.

- **Law**
  - The bill becomes an Act of Parliament and part of the law of Singapore.

Executive

The **Executive** performs the government function of **enforcing and implementing laws.** It consists of the President and the Cabinet. The work of the executive is supported by various ministries and statutory boards.

Composition	President, Cabinet

Function	• Enforces and implements laws passed by the legislature. • Formulates and implements government policies in areas such as education, healthcare, housing and transport. • Responsible for the day-to-day affairs of the state.

Judiciary

The **Judiciary** fulfils the government function of **interpreting and applying laws** through the courts. The Judiciary consists of the Supreme Court, the State Courts and Family Justice Courts. The head of the Judiciary is the Chief Justice.

Composition	Supreme Court, State Courts and Family Justice Courts
Function	• Administers justice by interpreting and applying laws made by the Legislature. • Makes formal judgements on disputes between individuals and on those between individuals and the government.

In January 2020, Singapore announced its first case of COVID-19. Various measures such as temperature screenings and stay-home notices were put in place to prevent the spread of the disease. By April, more than 900 people in Singapore had been infected.

Legislature: In April, amid the growing threat of COVID-19 in the country, the Singapore government urgently passed the COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) Act that made the wearing of masks compulsory by law. The Act was passed to prevent, protect against and control the transmission of the virus in Singapore.

Executive: Several government agencies were issued a letter of appointment by the Ministry of Health and involved in enforcing the COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) Act. The agencies include the following:

- Land Transport Authority (LTA)
- National Environment Agency (NEA)
- National Parks Board (NParks)
- The Singapore Police Force (SPF)

Officers from these agencies can issue offenders a Notice of Offense, which includes the fine amount and details of the offence. First-time offenders are fined $300 while repeat offenders are fined $1,000.
Thousands of Safe Distancing Ambassadors (SDAs) were also deployed. Their main tasks were to remind the public to abide by the regulations and ensure that masks were worn correctly.

Judiciary: Cases involving individuals who defy the law are often resolved with individuals paying the fine meted out by the enforcement officers. However, individuals who ignore the enforcement actions or commit more serious crimes are summoned to the state courts for sentencing.

For example, in 2020, a woman was caught on video arguing with a passer-by who had told her to wear a mask and abide by the law. On 7 May 2021, she was sentenced to two weeks' jail and fined $2,000 for failing to wear a mask as well as being a public nuisance.

Separation of Powers

The government's power is divided among the three branches of government in carrying out its functions. This **separation of powers** between the three branches prevents the concentration of power within a small select group. Each branch of government may also check that the other branches do not act illegally or irresponsibly.

- Legislature checks the Executive by asking Cabinet ministers questions on government policies for discussion or debate in Parliament.
- The Executive checks the Judiciary by the removal of judges under very limited circumstances (Such as misbehaviour or inability to perform their duties.)
- Judiciary ensures the Executive acts within the powers conferred to them by law.
  - If the Judiciary finds that an authority has acted unlawfully, it can cancel the decision made or order the authority to act lawfully.
- The Judiciary ensures that the laws passed are consistent with the Constitution. The Judiciary can declare that a law passed is void if it is deemed inconsistent with the Constitution.

Ensuring the Economic and Social Well-Being of Citizens

One way for governments to ensure citizens' economic and social well-being is by devoting significant resources to provide goods and services to the public. Such goods and services include education, healthcare, housing and transportation. These goods and services are usually highly subsidised so that all citizens have access to them.

Examples of Goods and Services for the Public

- Polyclinics located throughout Singapore are one-stop healthcare centres that provide subsidised primary care. Services include outpatient medical treatment and diagnostic tests.
- Different designs of public housing in Singapore are built by the Housing and Development Board (HDB). There are more than one million HDB flats which are homes to 80 per cent of the country's population.

- The Central Provident Fund (CPF) is a comprehensive savings plan that provides a foundation for the retirement of most Singaporeans. It can also be used to buy a home, pay for healthcare expenses and take care of loved ones.
    - The employee, employer, and government contribute to the employee's CPF savings.
    - The CPF Ordinary Account can be used to buy a home, pay for insurance and grow your savings through investments.
    - The Medisave Account helps you pay for your healthcare expenses and insurance.

SkillsFuture

SkillsFuture is a national movement to provide Singaporeans with the opportunity to develop their fullest potential throughout life, regardless of their starting points, through skills mastery and lifelong learning.

Key Features

- Skills-focused courses relevant to industry needs, for career development.
- Opening SkillsFuture Credit for Singaporeans in the year they turn 25 years old to encourage continuous learning.
- Work-Study Programmes for students to get a head start in the workforce.
- A subsidy of at least 90 per cent for eligible courses, including Ministry of Education (MOE) funded courses for Singaporeans aged 40 and above.

Promoting and Protecting a Country's National Interests

The government plays a vital role in **promoting and protecting the country's national interests.**

- Countries seek to protect or achieve their national interests.
- A country's national interests refer to what is necessary to ensure its security and well-being.
- These national interests influence the objectives of the country's **foreign policy.**

Diplomacy

- **Diplomacy** is the practice of obtaining agreement between countries to cooperate in order to produce results that align with their interests.
- Countries conduct diplomacy to promote common interests and resolve conflicting interests in a peaceful manner.
- With strong and friendly ties with other countries, a small country like Singapore can promote and protect its national interests.

Singaporean Bilateral Relationships

Singapore actively forges strong **bilateral relationships**. To do so, Singapore' political leaders meet with the leaders of other countries to exchange views and find ways to promote mutual interests in areas such as trade and security.

> Singapore maintains strong bilateral relations with Malaysia. An example of this is in **water security**, which serves Singapore's national interests.
>
> Under the **1962 Water Agreement**, Singapore draws 250 million gallons of raw water per day from the Johor River. In return, Singapore provides Malaysia with a daily supply of treated water up to 2 per cent of the volume supplied in Singapore.

Singaporean Multilateral Relationships

> Singapore's membership in the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** is one example of how the Singaporean government promotes and protects Singapore's national interests through multilateral relationships.
>
> ASEAN is a cornerstone of Singapore's foreign policy and is of critical importance to Singapore. Through ASEAN, Singapore has been able to establish partnerships with countries within and beyond ASEAN. One such partnership is the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**, a trade agreement signed by Singapore and 14 other Asia-Pacific countries.

RCEP: The World's Biggest Trade Agreement

- Deepen economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Facilitate expansion of trade and investment in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Increase opportunities for businesses and employment for the people in the Asia-Pacific region.

Businesses have more opportunities to expand in the Asia-Pacific region as the RCEP eliminates tariffs for about **90 per cent** of goods traded among the members.

Companies involved in e-commerce, digital services and digital services and digital trade can gain more confidence in expanding their businesses in the region. This is because RCEP is committed to protecting consumers' personal information, paperless trading, electronic authentication systems and cybersecurity.

Deterrence

Examples

The Military of Defence develops the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) to respond to military threats.

Developed and manufactured locally, the **Hunter Armoured Fighting Vehicle (AFV)** is the Singapore Army's first fully digitalised platform. It requires less manpower to operate. It also has touchscreen controls and an automatic system that enables the crew to detect and engage targets quickly and effectively.

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) are crucial for effective aerial surveillance and coordinated strikes. The Orbiter 4 CR-UAV can be deployed quickly and in confined areas to scan the battlefield so that commanders can understand the situation and make better decisions during operations.