

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
SINGAPORE
OFFICIAL REPORT
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OFFSET FROM GOVERNMENT REBATES FOR UTILITY BILLS

18 **Miss Cheryl Chan Wei Ling** asked the Minister for Finance (a) to what extent has the GST Voucher – Utilities-Save rebate helped to offset utility bills during periods of increases in electricity tariffs especially for rental flats; and (b) for those households under the Pay-As-You-Use scheme, whether this rebate can be directly credited into their prepaid utilities account.

Mr Heng Swee Keat: The permanent GST Voucher – U-Save scheme has enabled households in 1- and 2-room HDB flats to receive support which is equivalent to about three to four months of their utilities bills on average. Those living in 3- and 4-room HDB flats receive support equivalent to about one to two months of their utilities bills. The Pay-As-You-Use (PAYU) scheme is a pre-paid metering scheme launched by SP Services in May 2005 to support a small minority of HDB households whose electricity supply has been disconnected due to arrears in utilities payment. PAYU helps these households have their supply reconnected, while allowing them to settle their arrears over time¹. For a household on the PAYU scheme, the applicable U-Save rebate is already being credited to their utilities account to help reduce their arrears. If the arrears have been cleared and that household chooses to remain on the PAYU scheme, the U-Save then offsets the water and gas components of the bill.

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COST OF RE-ORGANISING HEALTHCARE CLUSTERS INTO THREE GROUPS

20 **Assoc Prof Daniel Goh Pei Siong** asked the Minister for Health (a) how much will the re-organisation of the healthcare clusters cost; (b) what are the considerations for re-organisation into the three clusters instead of two or more than three; (c) what additional concrete benefits of the re-organisation such as shorter waiting times for appointments, are there for patients.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: We announced in 2012 Healthcare 2020, which outlined our plan to expand capacity, improve quality and enhance the affordability of healthcare services. Even as we implement Healthcare 2020, we need to plan ahead further into the future. Last year, I

¹20% of credit payment goes towards settling outstanding arrears.

announced three key shifts to prepare for our healthcare needs beyond 2020: beyond hospital to community, beyond quality to value and beyond healthcare to health. This transformation is necessary as our healthcare needs will grow in volume and complexity due to our ageing population and increased chronic disease burden, among others. For this reason, we need to organise ourselves better so that we can implement the transformation more swiftly and decisively.

The public healthcare system will be reorganised into three integrated clusters, each having a fuller range of facilities, capabilities, services and networks across different care settings. This will enable them to deliver more comprehensive and person-centred health promotion, disease prevention, curative and rehabilitative care for the population in their respective regions.

Primary care will play an increasingly important role in our care transformation. After reorganisation, each cluster will have a group of polyclinics which, together with General Practitioner partners and community partners, can anchor care more firmly in primary and community settings. Collectively, these changes will ultimately benefit Singaporeans by providing more appropriate care and bringing care closer to them.

In addition to greater economies of scale, the reorganisation will also facilitate scaling up of programmes and services by the integrated clusters, and their collaborations with the private sector and community partners, across a wider region to benefit more Singaporeans.

The integrated clusters will be able to tap on a larger pool of manpower resources and talents. They will also be able to offer their employees a wider and deeper range of professional development opportunities, and a broader platform for cross-learning that will benefit staff and our patients.

We do not expect to incur significant financial cost for the reorganisation. The planned infrastructure and service developments are already included in our Healthcare 2020 Master Plan and the three key shifts I highlighted and they are separately catered for in our healthcare budget. These will need to be implemented regardless of the reorganisation.

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STUDY ON LEGISLATING ELDERCARE LEAVE

21 **Ms Kuik Shiao-Yin** asked the Minister for Health (a) what is the outcome of the Ministry's study on legislating eldercare leave for employees; (b) what are the barriers that impede legislation of eldercare leave; and (c) from 2012-2017, how many working caregivers do not have eldercare leave and how many working caregivers quit work to care for an elderly family member full-time.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: We recognise that caregiving is an important responsibility and is no easy feat, particularly for those who have to juggle between work and caregiving roles. The Ministry of Health has strengthened efforts to support caregivers by expanding the capacity of aged care services and the number of home and community care options.

We have been studying the issue of legislating eldercare leave in consultation with unions and employers. On balance, we are not ready to legislate eldercare leave at this time, as we need to strike a balance between employers' concerns on business costs and manpower constraints, and the employability of caregivers, versus the need for additional leave provision for eldercare purposes. There are existing leave provisions that can be used for this purpose.

According to MOM's Comprehensive Labour Force Survey, some 176,200 females aged 25 to 54 were outside of the labour force in 2016, of which 10% were due to caregiving for family members or relatives. In relation to that, we encourage companies to provide more family-related leave benefits which can be used for different purposes, as well as flexible work arrangements. We track this provision and the trends have been encouraging thus far.

Sixty-seven percent of employees work in companies that offer at least one formal flexible work arrangement last year, up from 56% in 2011. Close to eight in 10 employers also provide unplanned time-off or ad-hoc teleworking for their employees to attend to personal matters.

Public service agencies currently already provide two days of parent care leave per year. Some private companies have also done so. OCBC offers two days of family care to employees who are not entitled to childcare leave. Cerebos Pacific Limited, a manufacturing company, also offers family care leave on top of statutory leave.

We will continue to review the need for legislating eldercare leave as our socio-economic circumstances evolve over time.

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PUBLIC EDUCATION ON RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP

24 **Mr Darryl David** asked the Minister for National Development whether the Government will take stronger action against recalcitrant residents who flout HDB rules on pets as the incessant noise and unpleasant animal smells affect the surrounding environment and residents.

25 **Mr Seah Kian Peng** asked the Minister for National Development in light of the high proportion of pet-related complaints that HDB receives, whether more can be done to educate pet owners about responsibility and due care of their pets.

Mr Lawrence Wong: In high-rise, high-density Singapore, and especially in our housing estates, it is important for Singaporeans to be both responsible pet owners and considerate neighbours. Pet owners are wholly responsible for ensuring that their pets are well cared for, and that they do not adversely affect the wider living environment.

AVA has focused its efforts on raising public awareness about responsible pet ownership. For the younger generation, AVA holds two to three school talks and learning journeys every month. AVA is also developing a pre-school kit for kindergarten teachers to educate their students on animal care and welfare. For the broader community, AVA conducts responsible pet ownership roadshows every year. These roadshows include interactive displays, children's activities, competitions, talks and workshops. The most recent roadshow at Waterway Point in December 2016 attracted 12,000 attendees.

In the event that pets are causing a nuisance, HDB officers would advise the flat owners to take measures to stop the nuisance. Where necessary, parties concerned are also advised to attend mediation to resolve the issue amicably. In most cases, this improves the situation. For recalcitrant owners whose pets persistently cause disamenity, they may be required to re-home their pets with assistance from animal welfare groups. As a last resort, recalcitrant owners may be brought to court, where upon conviction, they can be fined up to \$4,000.

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POPULATION TREND FOR STRAY CATS

28 **Miss Cheryl Chan Wei Ling** asked the Minister for National Development (a) how does AVA monitor the population of stray cats in housing estates; (b) what is the population trend of stray cats over past three years; (c) what measures are put in place to manage its population; and (d) what actions are taken against irresponsible cat feeders.

Mr Lawrence Wong: AVA does not track the population of stray cats. But AVA works with the Cat Welfare Society (CWS) and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) on stray cat sterilisation. Efforts are also made to try to rehome stray cats, although this is not feasible in all cases.

Under the Stray Cat Sterilisation Programme (SCSP), AVA subsidises the cost of sterilising and micro-chipping stray cats in HDB estates, industrial and commercial areas, as well as in private housing estates. Through these efforts, the annual number of feedback cases on stray cats has dropped from more than 4,000 in 2014 to fewer than 3,000 in 2016.

AVA also works with CWS and the SPCA to educate community feeders to feed stray cats responsibly. This includes placing food in receptacles and clearing up after the feeding. If these conditions are not adhered to, irresponsible feeders can be fined up to \$2,000, \$4,000 and \$10,000 for their first, second and subsequent convictions for littering.

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ENSURING SAFETY OF SIGMA LIFTS INSTALLED FOR HDB FLATS

29 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for National Development (a) what steps is the Ministry taking or has taken to ensure that the Sigma lifts currently in operation are safe to use; and (b) whether it will be taking any action against Sigma and its parent company.

Mr Lawrence Wong: MND takes a serious view on the safety of lifts in Singapore. HDB has in place a comprehensive set of measures spanning lift procurement, installation and maintenance to ensure that lifts in HDB blocks are safe and fit for operation. In particular, lifts are procured through open tenders, and the evaluation process factors in quality and reliability of lift contractors. Audits, stress-tests and inspections in the presence of an independent Authorised Examiner (AE) are also conducted as part of a well-established lift commissioning process.

Sigma has been installing lifts in HDB estates for the past 10 years, and has generally met the prescribed performance standards. However, for a recent batch contract awarded to Sigma in 2013, Sigma was unable to meet the timeline for lift installation. Hence in late 2015, HDB restricted Sigma from tendering for new HDB lift contracts, to ensure that Sigma dedicated its resources to fulfil its contractual obligations. HDB also observed a higher-than-usual breakdown and fault rate in lifts from this batch contract in their first year of operations. The tender restriction has therefore not been lifted, and will continue until performance standards improve.

HDB's investigations revealed that while the design and installation of the affected lifts complied with prevailing codes and standards, the doors and sensors were more susceptible to misalignment from knocks. This, coupled with frequent heavy and rough lift usage during the first year period due to renovation and moving activities, resulted in the higher lift faults.

HDB has instructed Sigma to rectify these issues and to carry out improvement works to ensure that the lift doors and sensors operate smoothly. HDB has also issued stern warnings to Sigma, and is closely monitoring the performance of its lifts.

Both Sigma and its parent company have channelled more resources towards addressing the issues. In particular, Sigma has undertaken the rectification works progressively, and the performance of the lifts has improved. HDB will continue to hold Sigma accountable for ensuring its lifts meet the required performance standards.

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INCIDENCE OF POSTAL LETTERS DELIVERED TO WRONG ADDRESS

35 Er Dr Lee Bee Wah asked the Minister for Communications and Information (a) how often are postal letters delivered to the wrong address; (b) what action is being taken to improve the service; (c) what are the common reasons for the wrong delivery; and (d) whether any fine-tuning on the sorting process of letters and training of postmen are required.

Assoc Prof Dr Yaacob Ibrahim: Postal delivery in Singapore is regulated by the Info-communications Media Development Authority (IMDA). Under IMDA's Postal Quality of Service (QoS) framework, SingPost needs to deliver 99% of local basic letters destined for the Central Business District (CBD) by the next working day, and 98% of local basic letters destined for non-CBD areas. SingPost is also required to achieve 100% delivery by the second working day. These are one of the most stringent standards for local basic mail in the world.

SingPost delivers more than three million items a day. In 2016, SingPost received about 50 incidents of feedback concerning mis-delivered local basic letters. This is a significant improvement from 279 incidents of feedback concerning mis-delivered local basic letters in 2013 and 155 in 2015. Letters are mis-delivered for several reasons – the postman could have delivered the letter to the wrong letter box; or the address could have been incomplete or incorrectly written.

While the number of mis-deliveries is very small, IMDA takes a serious view of all cases as they inconvenience businesses and individuals. IMDA works closely with SingPost to reduce mis-delivery rates, and improve their quality of service. In that regard, SingPost has taken active steps in the last few years to improve its service quality:

- a. In 2014, SingPost invested \$45 million on sorting machines to improve mail sorting efficiency and accuracy.
- b. SingPost has enhanced its staff training programme, which includes the postmen code of conduct, on-the-job training and customer service training. Since 2014, SingPost has hired quality control officers to further ensure that letters are correctly delivered.
- c. Finally, as part of its ongoing efforts to engage senders of letters, SingPost provides a 24/7 customer care hotline and has service ambassadors stationed at post offices. SingPost also regularly updates its website with mailing guidelines and tips on addressing letters.

The drop in number of complaints over the last three years show that these efforts have been helpful. Nevertheless, IMDA will continue to monitor SingPost's performance, and review the Postal QoS framework, to ensure that SingPost continues to provide reliable and quality postal services for Singapore.

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PERIODIC ASSESSMENT FOR SERVICE PERSONNEL WHO HANDLE WEAPONS

38 **Assoc Prof Randolph Tan** asked the Minister for Defence whether service personnel in roles which involve access to weapons and live ammunition are periodically re-assessed on the stability of their emotional and psychological state.

Dr Ng Eng Hen: MINDEF/SAF recognises the importance of ensuring that all servicemen and women who handle live arms are of sound mind and physical capabilities. The SAF has in

place various levels of checks to determine the psychological well-being of service personnel. Before enlistment, all pre-enlistees undergo a comprehensive medical screening at the Central Manpower Base for both physical and mental health conditions. Pre-enlistees are asked explicitly if they have a previous record of mental health conditions during the screening. In addition, we require the parent or guardian to endorse this declaration. There is a balance between privacy for the enlistee and potential safety concerns of those with previous mental health conditions. But since 2016, MINDEF/SAF has also been working with the Ministry of Health to identify pre-enlistees with records of mental health history at public hospitals. If a possible mental health condition is surfaced, the pre-enlistee will be referred to appropriate specialists to certify that that enlistee is mentally capable of performing their National Service duties and to handle firearms.

A serviceman who is deemed unsuitable to handle firearms because of his emotional or psychological state are excused from such duties and re-deployed to vocations which do not require him to have access to weapons and live ammunition.

SAF servicemen have avenues to obtain counselling or medical assistance, should they face any emotional or psychological distress, including a 24-hour SAF Counselling Hotline. Those diagnosed with mental health conditions are closely monitored while in service, and where necessary, are provided with regular medical treatment and counselling by psychiatrists, psychologists, counsellors and para-counsellors. We deploy dedicated psychologists at the formation level to assist commanders in the management of such servicemen. At the unit level, our commanders interview all servicemen at regular intervals to find out if they are facing any stresses, including emotional or psychological problems. Commanders also undergo basic training to help them better understand mental health conditions, so that they can try to identify and manage servicemen with such conditions, including referring them to trained professionals for more assistance, or restricting their access to weapons and ammunition.

MINDEF and the SAF will continue to periodically review and strengthen the mental health system, in consultation with the SAF Psychiatry Specialist Advisory Board, which comprises senior psychiatrists drawn from public healthcare institutions, to ensure that all our servicemen are able to discharge their duties and at the same time, to receive good emotional and mental health care.

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AWARENESS AMONGST SCHOOL LEADERS FOR IMPORTANCE OF TRIPARTISM

39 **Mr Zainal Sapari** asked the Minister for Education (Schools) (a) whether there are efforts made to familiarise senior management and school leaders on the importance of tripartism and its role in creating an environment conducive for Singapore's growth; and (b) whether the Ministry has plans to collaborate with NTUC and its affiliated unions, through its current zonal-level sharing platforms, to understand and strengthen knowledge in tripartism further.

Mr Ng Chee Meng: MOE's senior management recognises the importance of tripartism for Singapore. At the Ministry level, there is strong partnership between MOE senior officials and the unions representing our employees. These include four teachers' unions (Singapore Teachers' Union, Singapore Chinese Teachers' Union, Singapore Malay Teachers' Union and Singapore Tamil Teachers' Union) and the Amalgamated Union for Public Employees (AUPE). Regular dialogues are conducted, during which the Ministry shares its plans and policies with the unions, and the unions share their ideas, plans and feedback with Ministry officials. Collaboration opportunities are also discussed during these dialogue sessions.

To reinforce the importance of tripartism among our school leaders, we have introduced a labour-management relations module in the leadership programme for senior educators. This newly introduced module helps senior educators to better understand the role of tripartism in Singapore and how strong employee-management relations in MOE help contribute to a strong education system.

The Member of Parliament has suggested that MOE strengthen knowledge of tripartism through its zonal-sharing platforms. I am glad to share that MOE has been engaging our cluster superintendents to enhance their understanding on the role of tripartism and our collaboration with the unions.

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ACTIVITIES TO ENCOURAGE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS TO TAKE CALCULATED RISKS

40 **Dr Lim Wee Kiak** asked the Minister for Education (Schools) (a) whether there are

plans to introduce more activities that will encourage secondary school students to think out-of-the-box; and (b) how can schools help to imbue in the students the spirit to take on calculated risks.

Mr Ng Chee Meng: To better prepare our students to thrive in the future, MOE has identified a set of 21st Century Competencies to develop in all students. Critical and Inventive Thinking is one of the competencies to be developed. By nurturing our students to be more inventive in their thinking, they will be more ready to think out of the box.

Critical and Inventive Thinking is developed through both the academic curriculum and the co-curricular programmes. Our efforts in this area have been building up steadily over the years.

During lessons, teachers stimulate curiosity and creativity in their students through the use of inquiry-based pedagogies, and novel and open-ended learning tasks. Such approaches encourage students to challenge assumptions, explore new possibilities and embrace uncertainties. Such dispositions are also nurtured through authentic learning experiences in Values-in-Action projects and Co-Curricular Activities, where students have to identify problems that need to be solved and come up with creative solutions.

We have also been providing students with more opportunities for applied learning. This will enable them to apply skills and knowledge gained in the classroom to address real-world problems. Examples of such opportunities include the Applied Learning Programme and Learning for Life Programme in primary and secondary schools, as well as Advanced Elective Modules and Applied Subjects in secondary schools.

To help students grow in their confidence to take calculated risks, our schools seek to provide a learning environment where students can feel safe to make choices, try new ideas and recover from setbacks. We need to help students find more intrinsic motivations in their learning so that they are driven more by a sense of passion. As our schools continue to strengthen their efforts in nurturing such traits in students, we recognise that such cultural shifts will take time and need to be reinforced at home.

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COMPLETION OF NEW BUKIT PANJANG POLYCLINIC

41 **Dr Teo Ho Pin** asked the Minister for Health whether he can provide an update on the

progress of the construction of the Bukit Panjang Polyclinic, its scheduled completion date and details of its range of medical services.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: The Bukit Panjang Polyclinic is being developed as part of a larger healthcare facility that also includes a nursing home and a senior care centre. Design of the Polyclinic is in progress, and physical construction is scheduled to begin by early 2018. The Polyclinic is targeted to begin operations by end 2020.

Like other polyclinics, the new Bukit Panjang Polyclinic will provide a suite of services, including medical treatment for acute conditions, chronic disease management, women's and children's health services as well as radiological, laboratory and pharmacy services. We are also planning for dental services to be available at this new Polyclinic.

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PROHIBIT CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOL IN AREAS CLOSE TO RESIDENTIAL BLOCKS

43 **Mr Darryl David** asked the Minister for Home Affairs whether the Government will prohibit alcohol consumption in all public areas in HDB estates that are close to residential blocks to prevent undesirable acts of indiscriminate urination, rowdy behaviour and acts of public affray that affect the residents of the affected blocks.

Mr K Shanmugam: Under the Liquor Control (Supply and Consumption) Act, consumption of alcohol in all public places, including public areas in HDB estates, is already prohibited between 10.30pm and 7.00am. The restricted hours were intended to minimise disruption to the usual activities of most residents. 10.30pm is the closing time of most businesses in residential areas, as well as the time when most community activities cease.

Since the Liquor Control Act came into effect on 1 April 2015, we have observed a general island-wide decline in the number of public order incidents related to liquor consumption and feedback on social dis-amenuities such as noise caused by people drinking in public late at night. There is therefore no necessity to extend the restricted hours for public consumption of alcohol at the present time.

The Member's suggestion to extend the restricted hours for certain areas in HDB estates is also challenging to implement. This would result in finely delineated zones within the same

HDB estate. Different common areas, depending on whether they were located near residential blocks, would have different restricted hours for alcohol consumption. Members of the public may be confused which zone they are in, making compliance and enforcement difficult.

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PROPOSAL FOR CHILD SEX OFFENDERS REGISTRY

44 **Dr Lim Wee Kiak** asked the Minister for Home Affairs (a) in the past five years, how many cases of child sex offences have been reported; (b) what is being done to reduce such crimes; and (c) whether there are plans to create a sex offender registry with limited access given to agencies and communities that can benefit from the information.

Mr K Shanmugam: From 2012 to 2016, the Police investigated an annual average of 325 cases of serious sexual crimes involving victims below the age of 16. Sexual penetration of minor made up the majority of serious sexual crimes, accounting for about 230 cases a year on average. This is followed by about 75 cases of rape a year and 20 cases of sexual assault by penetration a year.

Over the same period, the Police also investigated about 290 cases of outrage of modesty and 45 cases of sexual exploitation and sexual grooming per year. The trend for sexual crimes involving victims below 16 years of age has been stable over the past five years.

We take a serious view of sexual crimes, in particular when the victims are minors. To tackle these offences, we adopt a four-pronged approach.

Firstly, the Penal Code imposes stiff penalties for serious sexual offences. For instance, rape is punishable with an imprisonment term of up to 20 years and also liable to caning. If the rape involved a minor under the age of 14 without consent, the enhanced punishment is an imprisonment term of not less than eight years and up to 20 years with minimum 12 strokes of caning. We have also created specific offences targeting those who take advantage of the vulnerable, such as sexual grooming of minors.

Secondly, we enforce these laws firmly. Police take all allegations of sexual offences seriously. Sexual crimes are investigated by specialist units in the Police Divisions and the Criminal Investigation Department. The investigation officers in these units are trained to handle sexual crime investigations, as well as to manage sexual crime victims, including minors, with appropriate sensitivity.

Thirdly, we take a robust approach towards rehabilitation and reintegration of sex offenders, so as to reduce reoffending. For less serious offences, the court may make mandatory treatment orders requiring the sex offender to undergo psychiatric treatment. Sex offenders who are imprisoned for more serious offences are put through the sex offender treatment programme administered by the Singapore Prison Service, which seeks to reduce reoffending by enhancing self-management of sex offending behaviour.

Fourthly, the Police also work with relevant agencies to put in place proactive safeguards. These include conducting talks in MOE schools to educate students on precautions to protect themselves from sexual assault, and to raise awareness of the legal and social consequences of teenage sex. The Police also train teachers and school counsellors to recognise and report tell-tale signs of sexual assault or abuse in students.

The Member asked about plans to create a sex offender registry with limited access given to agencies. The Registration of Criminal Act allows the Police to maintain a non-public record of persons convicted of serious offences, including sexual offences. Agencies such as MOE and MSF work closely with the Police to screen prospective employees who are applying for jobs involving children. For example, MOE screens prospective employees for child care centres, kindergartens and schools with the Police. These processes ensure that persons who have committed serious sexual crimes are not employed in sensitive positions which may put children at risk, but without publicly listing sex offenders which will add to the stigmatisation of these offenders and hinder rehabilitation and reintegration efforts.

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CARE OPTIONS FOR ADULTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES WHOSE PARENTS OR CARE-GIVERS HAVE PASSED AWAY

48 **Mr Darryl David** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development what options are available for the long-term care of adults with intellectual disabilities when the parents/caregivers of these adults pass away or are unable to care for them any more.

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin: Parents and caregivers of adults with disabilities are encouraged to plan ahead for the care needs of their loved ones. As a first line of support, parents and caregivers can seek the help of other family members who are willing to continue to provide care. Parents may want to explore with these family members on the possibility of them applying

to the Courts to be appointed as a deputy who can make decisions for the adult with disability upon their mental incapacity or demise. This enables the person with disability to continue living in the community.

Caregivers and parents can approach the Special Needs Trust Company or SNTC whose case managers will work together with the family to develop a care plan that provides for the well-being of the person with disability in various aspects such as accommodation, daily living and medical needs.

One of the main concerns for parents and caregivers is providing sufficient financial support for their children with disabilities. SNTC assists parents to set up a Trust account to be managed and disbursed to meet the needs of their children with disability when required. SNTC also oversees the Special Needs Savings Scheme which allows parents to set aside Central Provident Fund savings for the long term care of their children upon their demise.

For parents and caregivers who require assistance in the care of their adult children with intellectual disabilities, there are community-based programmes such as Day Activity Centres and home-based care services.

The Adult Disability Home or ADH is a last resort for parents if there is no other family support for their adult children with intellectual disabilities. ADHs provide care for adults with disabilities who require long-term residential care. Today, there are six ADHs providing 690 places for adults with intellectual disability and there are plans to increase the number of places to 870 by the end of this year.

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CONVERSION OF GOVERNMENT-PAID ADOPTION LEAVE TO SHARED PARENTAL LEAVE

49 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Prime Minister whether the Government-Paid Adoption Leave (GPAL) can (i) be converted into shared leave which parents can allocate between themselves as they choose, instead of being open to mothers only and (ii) be extended to parents (both mothers and fathers) who adopt children above the age of 12 months old.

Mr Teo Chee Hean (for the Prime Minister): With the latest enhancements announced on 13 April 2016 which will take effect on 1 July 2017, adoptive fathers will enjoy the same leave provisions as biological fathers. What Mr Ng has proposed goes beyond what is provided

for biological fathers.

The Government is strongly committed to supporting Singaporeans in their aspirations to get married and raise families. Leave has been one of the key measures to help working parents, including adoptive parents, better manage their work and family commitments.

Leave provisions have been progressively enhanced over the years, and several new enhancements will take effect this year, including allowing a portion of Government-Paid Adoption Leave to be converted to shared leave. Specifically, the enhancements are:

(a) The second week of paternity leave has been made mandatory from 1 January 2017, which both biological and adoptive fathers are eligible for;

(b) Government-Paid Adoption Leave will be extended from four to 12 weeks from 1 July 2017; and

(c) Both adoptive and biological fathers will be able to share up to four weeks from their spouse's Adoption or Maternity Leave respectively.

With these enhancements, adoptive fathers will enjoy the same leave provisions as biological fathers, and working parents (biological and adoptive) will have more flexibility to decide on the allocation of leave that best suits their caregiving needs.

Adoption Leave – like Maternity and Paternity Leave – is intended to support parents of infants in their first year after delivery, when infants are more vulnerable and need more care. Hence, usage of the leave is limited to the child's first year of age. Beyond the child's infancy, all working parents, including adoptive parents, can take six days of paid childcare leave each per year until the child turns seven years old, and two days each per year when their children are between the ages of seven and 12 years. In addition, parents are eligible for six days of unpaid infantcare leave per parent each year, during the child's first two years.

Employers have provided feedback that even if the overall duration of leave provisions remains unchanged, extending their coverage (for example, beyond the first year of the child's life), or allowing even more flexibility in sharing the leave between parents, could have an impact on manpower and administrative costs, especially in a time of business uncertainties. We need to balance between providing support for employees with caregiving needs, and employers' concerns on business costs and manpower constraints, as well as the employability of caregivers. Given the significant enhancements made recently, we will not be adjusting the Adoption Leave provisions further, at this point of time.

It will be more important and sustainable for employers to provide a family-friendly work environment, such as by having flexible work arrangements in place, and for our wider community to create a more family-friendly environment in Singapore. Employers can tap on various resources to implement flexible work arrangements, including the WorkPro Work-Life Grant from the Ministry of Manpower and the Tripartite Advisory on Flexible Work Arrangements published by the tripartite partners.

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SMOKERS WHO DROP CIGARETTE BUTTS AND ASH FROM THEIR FLATS

50 **Miss Cheryl Chan Wei Ling** asked the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources what measures can be taken to prevent smokers who drop cigarette ashes and dispose used cigarette butts from their flats to their neighbours' units resulting in potential fire hazards and health concerns.

Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M: The indiscriminate disposal of cigarette butts from one's residential unit is an anti-social act which also poses a potential fire hazard if the cigarette butt is still lit when it is dropped.

When such feedback is received, the National Environment Agency (NEA) will first work with the respective Town Councils and grassroots organisations to conduct outreach efforts to residents to advise them against carrying out such inconsiderate acts. NEA will deploy surveillance cameras if the situation does not improve, and enforcement action will be taken against any persons caught littering.

My Ministry encourages all smokers to play their part by practising social graciousness and disposing of their cigarette butts and ashes in a responsible manner, so that everyone can enjoy a clean and safe environment.

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TRACKING OF FOGGING OPERATIONS IN PRIVATE CONDOMINIUMS AND LANDED ESTATES

51 **Mr Melvin Yong Yik Chye** asked the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources (a) whether NEA tracks the number of fogging operations carried out in private condominiums and landed estates annually; and (b) whether NEA will consider revising

guidelines to limit the number of fogging operations that can be done in one location every year.

Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M: Source reduction, or eliminating potential mosquito breeding habits, remains the most effective method to reduce the mosquito population. Nonetheless, fogging may still be required as a complementary approach when there is urgency to reduce a large mosquito population, such as in areas with active dengue transmissions. In such instances, repeated rounds of fogging may be necessary while concurrent efforts are made to remove the breeding habitats.

The National Environment Agency (NEA) provides guidance on fogging practices to Pest Control Operators (PCOs) to ensure that fogging is carried out properly. PCOs are also required to do a site assessment to ascertain the need to carry out such treatment and have to notify NEA before proceeding with each fogging operation. NEA does not impose any cap on the number of fogging operations that can be carried out in a particular location as such operations need to be calibrated according to the ground conditions such as the mosquito population which could be fairly dynamic in nature. If there are excessive fogging operations, NEA would engage the premises managers and the PCOs to adjust the fogging operations.

We cannot rely only on fogging to keep the mosquito population low. Everyone has to play his part in keeping the mosquito population in check by practicing the 5-step Mozzie Wipeout and removing any potential breeding habitats.

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REFUND RATE TO CUSTOMERS WHO PRE-PAID FOR SERVICES BY COMPANIES WHO LATER CLOSE DOWN

53 **Er Dr Lee Bee Wah** asked the Minister for Trade and Industry (Industry) (a) what has been the success rate of customers getting back their monies for unused prepaid services when a business closes down prematurely; and (b) whether the Ministry will make it mandatory for businesses offering prepaid service packages to provide prepayment insurance protection.

Mr S Iswaran: Our approach to consumer protection is based on promoting fair trading by retailers, and helping consumers make informed purchasing decisions including those on prepayments.

The Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE) has also worked with industry

associations to develop industry-specific CaseTrust accreditation schemes, covering areas such as spa & wellness, school transport, renovation and motor workshops. The majority of these industry-specific schemes offer prepayment protection for consumers. According to CASE, consumers who have prepayments with CaseTrust accredited businesses that offer prepayment protection to consumers, have not suffered monetary losses due to business closures in 2016. We encourage more businesses to be CaseTrust accredited, and to go further by providing prepayment protection if they collect advance payments from consumers. It is also important for consumers to be aware of the possible risks involved in making prepayments, and their capacity to bear with possible losses before taking up a prepaid package.

Genuine business failures which result in the loss of prepayments from consumers are unfortunate. Given the wide range of businesses, it is challenging to impose broad-based measures such as prepayment insurance to protect consumers against loss of prepayments from business closures. Such measures raise the cost of doing business which would be passed on to consumers. Overseas jurisdictions, including those in the European Union, Australia and Hong Kong, also recognise the challenges and do not impose broad-based prepayment protection measures. Businesses which engage in unfair practices when selling prepaid packages will be investigated by SPRING Singapore as the administering agency for the Consumer Protection (Fair Trading) Act.

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REVERSE MORTGAGES FOR SENIORS

57 **Mr Lim Biow Chuan** asked the Prime Minister whether there are plans to assist seniors to monetise their immovable assets by allowing financial institutions to provide reverse mortgages.

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam (for the Prime Minister): Financial institutions (FIs) used to offer reverse mortgages (RMs) to borrowers, but they have stopped because of low demand. Low demand for reverse mortgages is not unique to Singapore. In the United States, only 2-3% of eligible homeowners take up reverse mortgages².

²“Reverse Mortgage Design”, Joao F. Cocco and Paula Lopes, September 2015
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/finance/people/Teaching%20Fellows/pdfs%20and%20images/LopesReverseMortgageDesign.pdf>

Notwithstanding, property owners have other options to monetise their properties – rent out a spare room or the entire property, right-sizing possibly with the Silver Housing Bonus, or apply for the Lease Buyback Scheme. Private property owners may also obtain mortgage equity withdrawal loans, subject to FIs’ credit assessment and underwriting standards.

As our population ages, behaviour patterns may change. The Government will continue to review its policies to see if more monetisation options can be facilitated.

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PROPOSAL TO NATIONALISE PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

60 Ms **Kuik Shiao-Yin** asked the Minister for Education (Schools) (a) what are the considerations for keeping pre-school education privatised rather than nationalised as an extension of the current nationalised education system; and (b) what are the continual barriers or current issues that impede nationalisation of pre-school education.

Mr Ng Chee Meng: Today, we have a diversified pre-school sector, comprising commercial operators, non-profit operators, publicly-funded operators, as well as a few government-run kindergartens. A key benefit of this market-based approach is that it provides parents with a diverse range of programmes to choose from, so as to best cater to their preferences and the different needs of their young children.

That said, given the large number of operators participating in this sector, it is not surprising that fees, resources and quality will vary across pre-schools. A nationalised system has the potential to provide more consistent quality and affordability, but this system may not cater to the preferences of every parent.

Internationally, countries have adopted different approaches to early childhood care and education depending on their specific contexts. While some jurisdictions have a state-run preschool system, places such as Hong Kong and Australia adopt a similar approach as ours where private operators and the community play a significant role prior to formal primary education.

We recognise that the private sector and the community have built expertise over the years, and we value them as partners in our endeavour to ensure a strong start for every child. Hence, our priority now is to work together to raise the accessibility, affordability and quality of pre-school.

One important strategy has been to establish and partner closely with Anchor Operators and Partner Operators in the sector, whose pre-schools are subject to additional conditions, such as fee caps and quality requirements. Today, close to half of Singaporean children are benefitting from quality and affordable programmes in these pre-schools. We hope that this will continue to grow.

In addition, MOE plays an active role in supporting and strengthening quality of pre-school education. We are piloting a few MOE Kindergartens as an added quality and affordable option in the landscape. They also serve as incubators for the development of appropriate teaching resources and best practices in kindergarten education, which are shared with other pre-school operators. This complements other efforts to raise the quality of pre-school education in the sector, such as strengthening teacher training and developing a kindergarten curriculum for the sector.

We have made good progress with our current approach to pre-school provision. Today, more than 90% of Singaporean children aged 5 to 6 years are enrolled in a pre-school. In addition, after subsidies, lower-income families can pay as little as \$1 a month for their child to attend pre-school.

We will continue to monitor and review our policies for the pre-school sector to ensure that every child has access to good quality and affordable pre-school.

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ELDERSHIELD PREMIUMS PAID OUT SINCE 2002

61 Assoc Prof Daniel Goh Pei Siong asked the Minister for Health since the inception of ElderShield in 2002; (a) what has been the total ElderShield premiums paid; (b) what is the total surplus collected by the ElderShield insurers; (c) what is the total surplus returned to members as premium rebates; and (d) what is the payout ratio and profit margin of each of the ElderShield insurers.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: ElderShield is an insurance scheme that provides basic protection against the costs of long-term care arising from severe disability in old age. Premiums for policyholders are collected annually between age 40 and 65. Coverage starts at age 40 and the policyholder is covered for life. If a policyholder becomes severely disabled before age 65, he will no longer need to pay further premiums and will start to receive monthly ElderShield

payouts. From 2002 to end-2015, about \$2.6 billion have been collected in premiums and around \$100 million have been paid out in claims. About \$130 million in premium rebates have been given to policyholders so far, the first tranche in 2007 and another in 2012.

The oldest ElderShield cohort that enrolled at age 40 in 2002 will be turning 55 this year. The current age profile of policyholders is relatively young but will get older over time. As older people are more likely to become severely disabled compared to younger people, ElderShield payouts are expected to increase when the profile of policyholders gets older. Indeed, the proportion of claims over premiums collected has been increasing since ElderShield started in 2002, and this trend will continue in the future.

People who are not familiar with how ElderShield works may ask why the current amount of premiums collected is much higher than the amount of claims paid out so far. Some may even wrongly conclude that policyholders have been paying too much in premiums or that insurers have made excessive profits. Allow me to clarify the facts to address these misperceptions.

There are insurance schemes that provide coverage for the year in which the policyholder pays his premiums – when the policyholder stops paying premiums, the coverage ends. ElderShield works differently. It collects premiums while the policyholder is aged 40 to 65, and provides lifetime coverage from age 40, even after the policyholder reaches 65 and stops paying premiums.

Hence, it is prudent for the total amount of premiums collected to exceed the amount of claims paid while our policyholders are still young, because the premiums collected are meant to provide coverage against future claims throughout the policyholder's lifetime. As explained earlier, the proportion of claims over premiums collected has been increasing since 2002 and we can expect this trend to continue as the profile of our policyholders gets older over time. If the insurers do not collect enough premiums today and set aside some amounts for future claims, there is a risk that ElderShield will not be able to provide adequate coverage for policyholders as our population ages. It is important for insurers to ensure that policyholders will not face this situation.

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ANTI-TERRORISM AND CPR/AED TRAINING FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT WORKERS UNDER SG SECURE FRAMEWORK

62 **Mr Melvin Yong Yik Chye** asked the Minister for Home Affairs that as part of the SG Secure movement, (a) whether there are plans to incorporate compulsory anti-terrorism and CPR/AED training for existing and newly recruited public transport workers; and (b) if so, how often will refresher courses be conducted for these workers so that their knowledge and skills remain current.

Mr K Shanmugam: Since the launch of the SGSecure movement, MHA has been working closely with the Land Transport Authority (LTA) and the Public Transport Operators (PTO) to raise public transport workers' awareness of the terrorism threat and to equip them with knowledge and skills to respond to an attack.

The PTOs currently train some of their staff in first aid, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and the use of the automated external defibrillator (AED).

MHA has worked with LTA to incorporate the SGSecure messages of vigilance, cohesion and resilience into the training curriculum for bus captains at the new Singapore Bus Academy. These messages have been included in the taxi driver vocational licence and refresher courses at the Singapore Taxi Academy. These knowledge and skills are also reinforced by the PTOs during their staff in-service or in-house training. We will continue to work with LTA and PTOs to incorporate emergency response skills into their training programmes.

We are encouraged by the ground-up SGSecure initiatives by the transport industry community. For example, the National Transport Workers' Union organised a counter-terrorism seminar in December 2016 where 200 public transport workers learned how to prepare themselves for a terror attack. The National Taxi Association also organised a number of workshops in November and December last year which trained more than 100 taxi drivers in CPR, AED and first aid skills.

MHA will continue to work with LTA and the PTOs to enhance the current training and outreach initiatives, including exercises that hone their preparedness in the event of a terror attack. One such example was Exercise Heartbeat which involved one of the PTOs conducted in September 2016 at Bishan Bus Interchange and Junction 8.

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INVESTIGATIONS INTO JALLIKATTU-RELATED EVENTS IN SINGAPORE

63 **Mr Pritam Singh** asked the Minister for Home Affairs (a) how many individuals have

been investigated and/or charged over Jallikattu-related events in Singapore; and (b) of this number, how many are Singaporeans, PRs and foreigners respectively.

Mr K Shanmugam: The Police are investigating nine incidents of public assembly without a permit relating to the Jallikattu movement. Jallikattu is a bull-taming event practiced in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu as part of the Pongal festival. It was initially banned in India, which led to protests in India and other countries.

114 persons are under investigation by the Police for participating in these public assemblies without permits, of whom four are Singaporeans, 23 are Permanent Residents and 87 are foreigners. The incidents took place between 15 and 22 January 2017.

We take a strong stand against the importation of foreign politics by foreigners into Singapore. Foreigners visiting or living in Singapore are to abide by our laws, and should not import the politics of their own countries into Singapore.

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TREND OF WOMEN BEING ASKED BY EMPLOYERS NOT TO RETURN TO WORK AFTER MATERNITY LEAVE

64 **Ms Sun Xueling** asked the Minister for Manpower in 2016, how many women have notified the Ministry that they have been asked by their employer not to return to work after the end of their maternity leave and whether this number shows an increasing trend in the past two years.

Mr Lim Swee Say: Termination of employment during maternity leave rarely occurs. The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) received one such complaint in 2016. The case involved an employee who was terminated as the employer's business had failed and ceased operations. With MOM's intervention, the employee was able to recover her maternity leave benefits. The employer has also been issued a stern warning. There is no indication that such cases are on the rise.

Female employees are protected under the Employment Act and Child Development Co-savings Act. Those who have been unfairly dismissed during their pregnancy can appeal to MOM. If the dismissal is found to be without sufficient cause, MOM can order the employer to reinstate and/or compensate the employee. In addition, it is an offence to terminate the

employment of an employee while she is on maternity leave. Such an offence carries a penalty of up to \$5,000 fine and/or imprisonment of up to six months.

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MEASURES AGAINST HOARDERS WHO CAUSE DISAMENITIES TO NEIGHBOURS

65 **Mr Yee Chia Hsing** asked the Minister for National Development what are the measures available against HDB dwellers (such as hoarders and cat hoarders) who cause great disamenities to their neighbours and do not open their premises for authorised inspection by HDB officers.

Mr Lawrence Wong: When HDB receives feedback on hoarding in HDB flats, HDB will carry out an inspection. If excessive hoarding is found, the residents will be advised to remove the unwanted items, and reminded to keep their flat tidy. Most residents are generally cooperative.

In hoarding cases where there may be regulatory breaches, HDB will work with the relevant agencies such as the Singapore Civil Defence Force (for fire hazards) and NEA (for vectors). In cases of compulsive hoarding, which could be an indication of an underlying behavioural issue and would require professional help, HDB also works with health and social work professionals to provide counselling and appropriate assistance to the hoarder. HDB also ropes in the grassroots leaders and the hoarder's family in an effort to reduce disamenities.

As for feedback received on the keeping of cats, HDB will work with the flat owners and Animal Welfare Groups such as the Cat Welfare Society to re-home the cats. Recalcitrant owners, including owners who refuse to open up their premise for inspection by HDB officers, may be brought to court where they can be fined up to \$4,000 upon conviction.

In cases where there is reasonable cause to believe that the welfare of the cats is compromised, AVA has powers to enter the premises to investigate. The owners, if convicted in court for the offence of failure in duty of care, may be liable to a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, or both.

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PROGRESS ON CONSTRUCTION SECTOR'S PRODUCTIVITY ROADMAP AND CAPABILITY FUND

66 **Dr Teo Ho Pin** asked the Minister for National Development whether he can provide an update on (i) the progress of the Construction Productivity Roadmap by BCA and (ii) details of the Construction Productivity and Capability Fund including the total amount of funds disbursed to-date, the number of firms that have benefited from the fund, and the productivity improvements that such firms have made to-date, respectively.

Mr Lawrence Wong: The first Construction Productivity Roadmap was launched in 2010. We tightened the supply of lower skilled foreign manpower, required buildings to adopt more productive design, and supported firms as they invested in productive technologies and upgraded their workers. The second Roadmap was launched in 2015. It encourages even higher capital investments, intensifies our efforts to build up a quality workforce, and further facilitates collaboration among stakeholders across the construction value chain. Through the two Roadmaps, we have targeted a 20-30% improvement in construction site productivity by 2020.

The results are encouraging. Annual site productivity increases have improved progressively from 0.3% in 2010 to 2.0% in 2015. A 2.0% increase is also projected for 2016. The cumulative site productivity improvement is about 10% since 2010.

Almost \$800 million is available to firms through the Construction Productivity and Capability Fund (CPCF). As of end 2016, about \$450 million has been committed to over 9,000 firms in the built environment sector. 90% of these companies are small and medium-sized firms.

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EFFORTS TO REINTEGRATE DESTITUTE PERSONS WITH THEIR FAMILIES AND SOCIETY

67 **Mr Murali Pillai** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development (a) for each of the past three years, what has been (i) the number of destitute persons admitted into the custody of the Director of Social Welfare ("Director") (ii) the numbers discharged from the Director's custody (iii) the number of discharged destitute persons re-admitted into the Director's custody; and (b) what steps are taken to encourage destitute persons to reintegrate with their families and society.

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin: The number of destitute persons admitted into Welfare Homes under the custody of the Director of Social Welfare was 250, 251 and 207 for 2014, 2015 and 2016 respectively.

The number of destitute persons discharged from Welfare Homes was 182 in 2014, 172 in 2015 and 163 in 2016. These include persons who went on to independent living, and living with family or friends. These also include persons discharged to step-down residential care facilities and nursing homes.

In 2014, 39 destitute persons were re-admitted into Welfare Homes. There were 42 re-admissions in 2015 and 27 re-admissions in 2016.

Destitute persons who are admitted into Welfare Homes undergo rehabilitation programmes which impart social, work and life skills to prepare them for independent living in the community, whenever possible. Those who are assessed to have high potential for reintegration are placed on external employment, home leave and pre-discharge programmes to support their transition back to the community. They are also linked up with community resources where necessary to support their reintegration.

In addition, Welfare Homes support family reconciliation to address underlying issues and strengthen family relationships. Volunteers and community agencies also work with Welfare Homes to complement their rehabilitative efforts.

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ADDITIONAL HELP FOR PEOPLE SEEKING SOCIAL ASSISTANCE GIVEN

SLUGGISH ECONOMY

National Archives of Singapore

68 **Mr Seah Kian Peng** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development given the sluggish economy and uncertain outlook ahead, whether the Ministry has seen an increase in the number of people seeking social assistance and, if so, what additional measures will the Ministry be instituting to provide relief to this group of affected people.

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin: The number of applications for ComCare Short-to-Medium Term Assistance was 60,170 in 2015, and 57,694 in 2016. Over the four quarters in 2016, the number of applications has hovered around 14,000 to 15,000 per quarter, with no clear trend.

MSF is closely monitoring the situation with regard to the number of households stepping

forward for assistance and their profiles. MSF stands ready to provide additional support, just as we did during the 2009 global financial crisis. Let me share on some of these additional support measures:

First, we are prepared to exercise greater flexibility in providing ComCare assistance to support households. For example, our SSO officers can provide retrenched workers with a longer duration of assistance if they require more time to find a job. This could be a result of external factors beyond the individual's control, such as limited availability of job openings that fit his or her skillset.

Second, we are prepared to step up our manpower temporarily at our SSOs if there are significant increases in applications for ComCare assistance, so that households in need continue to receive assistance in a timely manner.

Third, our SSOs will also work with the Family Service Centres to assist recently retrenched clients who may require counselling and support.

In addition, through an initiative by the National Council of Social Service, companies can engage social service organisations to deploy social service professionals on-site during restructuring exercises to provide support to those affected and information on community resources available.

MSF will continue to monitor developments in the labour market closely, and work with Government agencies and community partners to provide support and assistance to individuals and families in need.

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ELECTRICITY PRICES FOR SINGAPORE HOMES AND BUSINESSES COMPARED TO OECD AVERAGE

69 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for Trade and Industry (Industry) how does the price of electricity for (i) homes and (ii) businesses compare to the OECD average in each year from 2011 to 2015.

Mr S Iswaran: Between 2011 to 2015, Singapore's regulated electricity tariffs were on average 23% higher than the OECD's average retail electricity costs.

I would point out that such a comparison is of limited value because the OECD average includes a wide range of countries. They vary in terms of energy policy with some subsidising

certain forms of electricity production (for example, in Germany, the US, and Spain). We do not subsidise electricity generation or consumption. The fuel mix is also varied among OECD countries with some having access to coal, nuclear energy, and renewables like hydropower. In contrast, 95% of electricity generation in Singapore uses natural gas imported at global prices. A comparison of average end-use prices for industrial users is even more challenging because, as observed by the International Energy Agency, industrial consumers can purchase electricity through private contracts instead of the regulated market, with variable and often confidential pricing arrangements.

As an energy importer and price taker, Singapore cannot be insulated from movements in the global energy market. Our aim is to foster a competitive energy market for the benefit of all consumers.

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CONFLICT-OF-INTEREST ISSUES IN COMPETITION COMMISSION OF SINGAPORE'S INVESTIGATIONS AGAINST GOVERNMENT-LINKED COMPANIES

70 **Mr Pritam Singh** asked the Minister for Trade and Industry (Trade) what safeguards are instituted by the Ministry to ensure that investigations carried out by the Competition Commission of Singapore against Government-linked companies (GLCs) or companies predominantly owned by statutory boards and/or GLCs are free from conflicts of interests.

Mr Lim Hng Kiang: Private sector entities, regardless of ownership, are required to comply with the Competition Act. Entities in specified sectors such as media, telecommunications, gas and electricity, which are regulated by other Government regulatory agencies are excluded from the Competition Act.

Private sector entities which engage in anti-competitive activities can be investigated by the Competition Commission of Singapore (CCS). The First Schedule of the Competition Act requires any member of the Commission who may have a vested interest in a business being investigated to declare this interest and recuse himself or herself where deliberations or decisions involving that business may take place.

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DEMERIT POINTS FOR SOME PARKING OFFENCES

71 **Dr Tan Wu Meng** asked the Minister for Transport (a) what are the reasons underpinning LTA's decision to impose demerit points for certain vehicle parking and vehicle stopping offences; and (b) whether such demerit points are calibrated to be proportional when compared with other traffic offence penalties.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: Only serious parking and stopping offences, such as parking within a pedestrian crossing, or stopping on the shoulder or verge of an expressway, attract demerit points. These offences not only impede the flow of traffic, but also endanger other road users by obstructing their line of sight. Demerit points for parking are calibrated to be proportional to other traffic offences which also attract demerit points.

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AED KITS ON TRAINS AND BUSES

72 **Mr Melvin Yong Yik Chye** asked the Minister for Transport (a) whether there are plans to equip all train stations and bus interchanges with AED kits that are easily accessible; and (b) whether LTA will consider working with the public transport operators to equip all public buses, trains and taxis with AED kits for use during emergencies.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: There is at least one Automated External Defibrillator (AED) at all our bus interchanges and MRT stations. These are situated near the Passenger Service Office as the staff there are trained to use them.

We do not have AED kits on all public buses, trains and taxis. We would have to consider the practicality of equipping every bus, train and taxi with one. Instead, the personnel have been trained to respond to emergencies by seeking immediate medical help. For instance, bus captains would immediately request for an ambulance through their Operation Control Centre. When the train pulls into the station, the staff at the station, who would have access to the AED at the station, would attend to the passenger requiring medical assistance.

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DISAMENITIES CAUSED BY PUBLIC EVENTS AT BAY EAST GARDEN

73 **Mr Lim Biow Chuan** asked the Minister for National Development (a) how many

private events have been held at Bay East Garden for the last 12 months; (b) what measures are taken to ensure that the events held do not pose any disamenity to the residents living near Bay East Garden; and (c) whether there can be better control of the events held at Bay East Garden to ensure that events are not too noisy and that vehicles parked by participants in the area are not parked illegally.

Mr Lawrence Wong: Eleven private events were held at Bay East Garden over the past year. The events are largely outdoor activities like family days and sporting events.

Each event application is assessed by Gardens by the Bay Company (GB Co.) to ensure a minimum amount of disruption and disamenity to Gardens' patrons and nearby residents. For example, events that attract large crowds or tend to be noisy will be directed to locations further away from residential areas.

GB Co. will also ask the organisers to keep local residents informed of upcoming events in the spirit of good neighbourliness. This allows for any concerns to be heard and addressed before the event takes place. Moreover, organisers must adhere to GB Co.'s venue hire terms and conditions. This includes requirements that organisers keep to within specific noise level caps at all times.

Finally, event organisers have to adhere to the requirements of our traffic authorities. For instance, if buses are chartered for certain large scale events, the organisers may be required to deploy auxiliary police for effective traffic management.

GB Co. officers carry out checks during events and organisers have been generally cooperative. GB Co. will continue to work closely with event organisers to ensure that Bay East Gardens remains an enjoyable, inclusive, and well-utilised community space for all.

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NUMBER OF UNSOLD RESIDENTIAL UNITS

74 **Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar** asked the Minister for National Development (a) to date, how many unsold dwelling units built by property developers are there still available in the market; (b) how many dwelling units are there available in the market put up for sale by home owners; and (c) whether the Ministry will consider slowing down or halting the sale of land parcels for residential development in light of the current sluggish property market.

Mr Lawrence Wong: At the end of 2016, there were about 9,700 unsold private dwelling units, including from executive condominium developments, which have been launched for sale by developers. These include completed and uncompleted units.

If we include those that have received planning approvals but have not yet been launched for sale, the figure is about 25,000 dwelling units. This is a historical low since the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) started compiling such data in 2001.

The Member also asked about the number of dwelling units put up for sale by home-owners. URA does not compile such data as home-owners are not required to report their intention to sell their homes.

The demand for private housing remains robust. In 2016, developers sold about 12,000 dwelling units, or 20% more than the approximately 10,000 units sold in 2015. Apart from housing demand, the Government considers other factors such as overall economic and property market conditions to determine the housing supply to be provided in each Government Land Sales (GLS) programme.

As the current inventory of unsold units is at a historical low, it is important to maintain a healthy level of housing supply to mitigate any shortages in the future. We do not have immediate plans to slow down or halt the supply of private housing through the GLS programme.

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DECISION ON DRIVERLESS TAXIS IN SINGAPORE

75 **Ms Sun Xueling** asked the Minister for Transport how is the trial operation of nuTonomy driverless taxis progressing and what benchmarks will the Ministry use to determine when driverless taxis can be rolled out in more parts of Singapore and its associated timeline.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: nuTonomy is one of four organisations, besides A*STAR's Institute for Infocomm Research, Singapore-MIT Alliance for Research and Technology and Delphi Automotive Systems, that is testing self-driving vehicles at one-north. nuTonomy started trialling on a 6-kilometre test route in April 2016, and since January this year, they have expanded their testing to a 12-kilometre route. I am told that their trials have generally been smooth except for an incident last year. nuTonomy's aim is to gradually expand their trials into larger and more complex environments.

Significant challenges have to be overcome before self-driving technology is ready for widespread deployment. Self-driving vehicles need to be able to co-exist safely with a high volume of human-driven vehicles, cyclists, people on personal mobility devices, and pedestrians. They will need to be able to deal with unexpected situations like fallen tree branches or jaywalkers. In Singapore, they also need to function effectively under low visibility conditions, such as during heavy rain or haze. Industry experts expect the technology to reach that state in about 10 to 15 years. In the meantime, LTA will continue to work with the participants to expand the area and complexity of their trials progressively.

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MORE PARKING OPTIONS FOR HEAVY VEHICLE OWNERS

77 **Mr Liang Eng Hwa** asked the Minister for National Development whether Government has plans to build more heavy vehicle parks and to improve its public transport connectivity so that these vehicle parks can be more accessible to the drivers.

78 **Mr Liang Eng Hwa** asked the Minister for National Development whether HDB can consider raising the allowable unladen weight for vans and light goods vehicles at HDB multi-storey car parks beyond the current 1,800 kg to 2,100 kg so that such vehicle owners/drivers can find more convenient parking and ease the season parking demand pressure on those popular heavy vehicle parks.

Mr Lawrence Wong: Currently, there are about 43,190 heavy vehicle parking spaces island wide, which exceeds the 33,680 heavy vehicles registered with LTA. About 74% of the heavy vehicle parking spaces are privately operated and located in industrial estates.

The remaining 26% of heavy vehicle parking spaces is managed by URA and HDB in the form of temporary heavy vehicle parks located within or at the fringes of residential areas. Over time, these temporary heavy vehicle parks will be progressively phased out, partly to make way for new developments, and partly because having heavy vehicles enter densely populated heartland precincts poses a safety risk, especially to the elderly and young children. To facilitate this transition, agencies are incorporating new heavy vehicle parks within industrial developments that are near to residential areas, where feasible.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of business owners to provide or secure parking for the

vehicles that they own, and to provide their drivers with the appropriate transport options to get to their vehicles for work. This is especially so if they require their drivers work during odd hours.

Commercial vehicles, such as vans and light goods vehicles, with unladen weight exceeding 1,800 kg, are generally not allowed to park in HDB residential car parks for safety and environmental reasons.

However, HDB does exercise flexibility by allowing them to use the residential car parks if the vehicles can fit within a standard car lot, and do not obstruct or endanger other car park users. Such vehicles should, however, not exceed an unladen weight of 2,000 kg if they intend to park within HDB multi-storey car parks (MSCP) as the MSCPs are not designed to withstand vehicular weights beyond this limit. Those that exceed an unladen weight of 2,000 kg can park in HDB surface residential car parks. They can also park at commercial and industrial car parks, as well as heavy vehicle parks.

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AVAILABILITY OF HDB RENTAL FLATS AND RENTAL FLATS CONVERTED FOR SALE

80 **Mr Png Eng Huat** asked the Minister for National Development as of 31 December 2016, what is the number of (i) available vacant HDB rental flats (ii) rental flats converted for sale with a shorter lease and (iii) such converted flats sold.

Mr Lawrence Wong: As at end 2016, there were about 4,500 vacant rental flats.

To promote homeownership, when existing rental flats are vacated, they can be considered for conversion to sold flats if viable. Over the years, about 9,300 ex-rental flats were converted, most of them before 2011. These flats are sold with the balance of the 99-year leases. Of these, about 9,000 flats have been sold.

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