

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**  
**SINGAPORE**  
**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
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## **ADVICE ON POTENTIAL RISKS OF ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS**

23 **Dr Chia Shi-Lu** asked the Minister for Health in view of the growing body of research about the downsides and potential risks of artificial sweeteners, whether the Ministry will be updating its advisories to vulnerable groups, patients and in their public education communications.

**Mr Gan Kim Yong:** There is consensus amongst international health authorities and medical professionals that artificial sweeteners can be used as part of a balanced diet to help a gradual shift away from high sugar food and beverages. Currently, no jurisdiction has banned artificial sweeteners. The US Food and Drug Administration and the European Food Safety Authority have allowed the use of artificial sweeteners for human consumption.

However, the sale of artificially sweetened food and beverages is not allowed in schools in Singapore as we want to prevent children from developing a habit of consuming sweet-tasting food and drinks. This complements our healthy meals programme in schools which promotes the drinking of plain water.

We will continue our efforts to raise public awareness and foster a supportive environment for consumers to make healthier food and beverage choices, and to keep Singaporeans healthy and active.

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## **CHANGES IN BENEFITS FOR PARKING LABELS FOR THE DISABLED**

24 **Mr Alex Yam** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development (a) how will the Ministry ensure that those holding Class 1 Car Park Labels for Persons with Physical Disabilities but who are not using "bulky" mobility aids, yet with a genuine need for the use of accessible car park lots, will not be disadvantaged by the revisions to the scheme which will take effect in November 2017; (b) how does the Ministry intend to reduce abuses of the scheme; and (c) whether the Ministry will undertake a comprehensive review of the availability and provision of accessible car park lots with the Ministry of National Development.

25 **Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development

whether the Ministry will review the eligibility criteria to grant car park labels for persons with disabilities so as to include not just wheelchair-bound drivers but also other drivers who need some form of physical support such as walking aids.

26 **Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development (a) what is the rationale behind the recent policy changes on parking label benefits for the disabled; (b) what are the top three concerns raised by those affected by the changes; and (c) what are the Ministry's responses to the concerns raised.

27 **Miss Cheryl Chan Wei Ling** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development (a) what percentage of disabled persons who no longer qualify under the new Class 1 car park label has purchased cars under LTA's Disabled Persons Scheme; and (b) over past five years, how many drivers with Class 2 car park labels have been summoned for using handicap car park lots when not ferrying a person with disabilities.

**Mr Desmond Lee:** The Car Park Label Scheme (CPLS) was introduced in 1980 to assist drivers with physical disabilities in boarding and alighting from their vehicles. The CPLS was extended in 1996 to include caregivers who drive passengers with physical disabilities. Drivers with the CPLS label can park in dedicated car park lots that are marked in blue with the accessible symbol of a person in wheelchair.

There are two types of labels:

- (i) The Class 1 label is for drivers with physical disabilities; and
- (ii) The Class 2 label is for passengers with physical disabilities.

The Class 1 label allows drivers with disability to park in accessible parking lots for as long as they need, with no time limit. The Class 2 label allows the caregiver-drivers to park in a designated lot for up to an hour, to assist their passenger with disability to board or alight. Thereafter, the vehicle must be shifted to a standard parking lot to free up the accessible lot to other eligible users.

Demand for accessible lots has been rising, and this increase will further accelerate with our ageing population. The number of new label holders has increased by almost 40% from 2012 to 2016, from 1,273 to 1,758.

To meet the needs of people with disability, Government agencies have been working on a

range of measures. Let me highlight a few:

(i) First, we endeavour to provide adequate accessible parking lots.

- The provision of such lots is mandated under the 2013 Code on Accessibility. The code also requires the provision of accessible and sheltered drop-off points, with direct access to every block at residential estates.

- There are currently about 6,000 accessible lots across public car parks managed by HDB, URA and NParks.

- Beyond what is provided for under the Code, the Housing and Development Board (HDB) and Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) have been putting in more accessible lots in areas where there is high demand, wherever this is feasible.

- The Building and Construction Authority (BCA) is currently reviewing the Code, as part of its ongoing review on accessibility. This includes studying the availability and provision of accessible lots.

- Given our physical constraints, however, there will be a limit to how many more accessible lots we can have.

(ii) Second, agencies have moved to curb abuse and the indiscriminate use of accessible lots.

- This begins with education. The National Council of Social Service conducts ongoing public education and outreach, to increase awareness about the appropriate use of accessible lots.

- Beyond education, stiffer penalties have been put in place since December 2015, to deter people who park indiscriminately in parking lots meant for people with disability.

- The composition fine for first-time offenders was increased from \$50 to \$200, and the penalty for repeat offenders was increased to up to \$400.

- Miss Cheryl Chan asked about the number of persons who have been penalised for indiscriminate use of the lots.

- Last year, enforcement agencies issued 2,200 summonses for misuse of accessible lots in public car parks.

- We do not have a breakdown on the number of summons issued to Class 2 label holders, and the number issued to drivers without labels parking in the accessible lots.

- We are working closely with agencies to strengthen enforcement.

(iii) Third, we have put in schemes and programmes to make public and private transport

more accessible to persons with disabilities.

- One example is the Public Transport Concession card that was introduced in 2014 to help defray the cost of transport for persons with disabilities.

- Another example is barrier-free access and the provision of lifts and ramps at MRT stations and selected Pedestrian Overhead Bridges.

- As of August this year, the Taxi Subsidy Scheme was enhanced to cover up to 80% of the cost of travel in taxis including private hire cars for work, school and in addition training; up from 50% support previously.

(iv) Fourth, we come to the revisions that we will make to the Car Park Label Scheme (CPLS), from 1 November 2017.

- MSF and MND had consulted existing Class 1 and 2 label holders as well as Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs), such as Handicapped Welfare Association, Disabled Persons Association and SPD as part of the review of the CPLS.

- The objective was to see how we could ensure that persons with disabilities, who require the use of accessible lots for boarding and alighting, can be better assured that these lots will be available when they need them.

- Beyond measures that I had outlined earlier regarding education, enforcement, and making more accessible lots available, there was general agreement that we should reserve accessible lots for persons with disabilities who require the additional space to board and alight from their vehicles and are therefore more in need of such lots.

Hence, under the new eligibility criteria, car park labels will be issued to those who are medically certified as having physical disabilities and who require additional space to embark and disembark from their vehicles. These would include people using bulky mobility aids - such as wheelchairs, walking frames, and lower-limb prostheses. In addition, those with medical conditions such as muscular dystrophy, poliomyelitis and cerebral palsy will be considered based on their conditions and needs. I would like to assure Members that MSF and SG Enable will exercise flexibility when applying the new eligibility criteria and look at the physical needs and condition of each applicant, even if they do not fully meet the default eligibility criteria.

Miss Cheryl Chan asked about the proportion of persons who will not qualify for the Class 1 labels, and who had bought cars under the Disabled Persons Scheme (DPS). The DPS is a financial scheme that supports persons with disabilities who are unable to use public transport

and need to drive to work. Under the DPS, eligible drivers with disabilities are exempted from paying premiums for the certificates of entitlement (COE) and the additional registration fee (ARF) when they purchase a vehicle. There are around 165 persons in the DPS (81%) who also hold Class 1 labels. Not all DPS beneficiaries apply for CPLS as they may not require the additional space afforded by these accessible lots, for boarding and alighting from their vehicles. The two schemes therefore serve slightly different needs: Individuals on DPS do not by default also need a CPLS Class 1 label. That said, any CPLS renewal will take into consideration the applicant's current condition and mobility needs.

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## **ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT OFFICERS FOLLOWING LAPSES IN CONTROLS**

29 **Ms Foo Mee Har** asked the Minister for Finance whether there will be an accountability review of Government officers involved given the lapses in financial controls in grants administration, management of development projects, as well as IT governance as reported in the Report of the Auditor General for FY2016/17.

**Mr Heng Swee Keat:** Ms Foo asked about accountability review of the officers involved. The head of each of the agencies concerned, be it the Permanent Secretary of a Ministry or the Chief Executive of a Statutory Board, is responsible for investigating the cases under his agency, rectifying the lapses and taking the appropriate disciplinary actions.

The lapses highlighted this year by AGO were due to individual negligence, human errors or situations where procedures were in place but not followed. There is no evidence of a systemic weakness within government agencies in terms of compliance. The officers responsible for these lapses will be held accountable and will be subject to disciplinary actions, commensurate with the officer's culpability and the severity of the mistake. The lapses will also be considered when appraising the officer's performance.



As of today, of the 14 observations in the AGO report, rectification and staff actions have been completed for nine while the remaining five are in progress. They are expected to be completed, latest by October 2017. The Auditor-General has also said it will ascertain that follow-up actions are taken. As it has demonstrated in past years' reports, AGO will not hesitate to highlight situations where it finds that agencies have failed to follow up as they had indicated. Agencies are also accountable to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and PAC reports are publicly available.

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### **LESSONS FROM ACCIDENTS INVOLVING YOUNG DRIVERS OF PRIVATE-HIRE CARS**

30 **Mr Zainal Sapari** asked the Minister for Transport what are the key lessons that LTA has learnt from the accidents involving young drivers of private hire cars.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** LTA has imposed a minimum of two years' driving experience, rather than a minimum age, on applicants for the Private Hire Car Driver's Vocational Licence. Traffic accident data does not show that there is a higher incidence of accidents among younger drivers.

LTA also rejects applicants with a poor driving record, such as conviction for drunk driving and those who have had their driving licence revoked. These conditions are reviewed regularly.

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### **INCREASE IN ACCIDENTS INVOLVING PRIVATE-HIRE CARS**

31 **Mr Ong Teng Koon** asked the Minister for Transport whether accidents involving private hire drivers have increased more than proportionately to the number of private hire drivers.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** It has not. Over the last two years, the number of private hire cars has tripled. The number of accidents involving such cars has similarly increased by about three

times.

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## **IMPACT OF NEW NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT ON EXISTING COURSE PROVIDERS**

32 **Mr Darryl David** asked the Minister for Education (Schools) how will the setting up of the new National Institute of Early Childhood Development (NIEC) affect the institutions presently conducting early childhood education programmes such as the polytechnics, ITE and SEED institute, especially in terms of (i) staffing issues (ii) enrolment and (iii) the perceived quality of the certification issued by these institutions.

**Mr Ng Chee Meng:** The National Institute of Early Childhood Development (NIEC) will bring together and build on the Early Childhood (EC) training capabilities and expertise of Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Temasek Polytechnic, ITE and SEED Institute. These four institutions will transfer their EC programmes, faculty and students to the new NIEC once it is set up in 2019.

MOE is working with the four institutions on the transition of their EC faculty and staff to NIEC. About 60 to 70 full-time faculty with core expertise in EC are expected to transfer their employment to NIEC. There are about another 100 adjunct EC faculty currently employed by the four institutions on a contract basis. There will continue to be a role for the adjunct faculty to teach in the EC courses at NIEC. MOE and the four institutions will continue to engage the affected faculty and staff closely and see to the change management process for all.

For students, all EC students enrolled in the courses to be transferred from the four institutions to NIEC will be considered NIEC students from 2019. There will be limited impact on the overall student enrolment at the polytechnics and ITE, as they continue to run many other courses. In addition, pre-Employment Training (PET) students will concurrently be identified as students of the polytechnic or ITE where their course is sited. We expect NIEC's intake to comprise more than 2,000 students in its first year, and continue to grow thereafter.

NIEC will award the qualifications for students graduating in 2019 or later. For PET students, they will receive diploma and Higher Nitec certifications awarded by NIEC in collaboration with the polytechnics and ITE respectively. This recognises the role that the polytechnics and ITE continue to play in the NIEC PET students' educational experience, for

example in the common, non-EC modules that they will take alongside their ITE and polytechnic peers.

We expect the NIEC-awarded EC qualifications to be well-recognised in the EC sector. EC alumni of the four institutions can be assured that their certificates will still be recognised in the sector.

The formation of NIEC has been welcomed by many as a significant, positive development for the EC sector and profession. We are heartened that the institutions involved see value in coming together to support the establishment of NIEC, for the greater benefit of the sector.

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### **IMPACT OF INCREASE IN MOE KINDERGARTENS ON SMALLER PRE-SCHOOL OPERATORS**

33 **Mr Darryl David** asked the Minister for Education (Schools) what will be the impact on smaller independent operators in the early childhood education industry with the proposed significant increase in MOE kindergartens along with the already significant increases in early childhood and kindergarten places by the major anchor childcare operators.

**Mr Ng Chee Meng:** The Government's foremost objective is to ensure that parents have access to quality and affordable preschools for their children. This will provide a good start for every child and better support families with young children.

To this end, the Government will be increasing the number of government-supported preschool places, which are subjected to fee caps and other quality requirements. This increase will be primarily in estates with new housing developments to meet the anticipated demand of young families.

Besides the Anchor Operators and MOE Kindergartens, government-supported operators also include small- and medium-sized private child care operators that have joined the Partner Operator Scheme. We currently have 23 Partner Operators operating a total of about 200 centres, and we expect to support more centres under this scheme. We intend for the Anchor and Partner Operators, as well as MOE Kindergartens, to play a catalytic role to spur investments in quality in the sector, while providing affordable options for parents.

We will also continue to provide broad-based support for the sector as a whole, to benefit all operators and early childhood educators. These include various grants such as funding for smart solutions to raise productivity, and stronger support for professional development via the Skills Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education and the National Institute for Early Childhood Development (NIEC).

Overall, the market will remain open and parents will continue to have choice in selecting a suitable preschool for their children. Smaller operators, some of which offer niche programmes, can continue to cater to the different needs and preferences of parents.

I encourage all operators to make use of the schemes available to invest in uplifting the quality of their centres and teachers, in tandem with the overall improvements in the preschool sector. This will help to contribute to a strong foundation for our children.

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## **CHECKS ON HAWKER CENTRES FOR COMPLIANCE WITH FIRE SAFETY REGULATIONS**

34 **Dr Lim Wee Kiak** asked the Minister for Home Affairs (a) how often are hawker centres checked for fire safety compliance; (b) what is the breakdown of such fires from 2015 till July this year; (c) what are the common causes of these fires; and (d) what can be done to address fire hazards at hawker centres.

**Mr K Shanmugam:** The Fire Code stipulates that hawker centres need to have hose reels and fire extinguishers, and adequate, unimpeded access to facilitate escape in the event of a fire. There are also regulations on the use of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) for cooking, and cleaning requirements for kitchen exhaust ducts.

SCDF adopts a risk-based approach to conducting fire safety compliance checks. Hawker centres are generally assessed to be of lower fire risk as their open-sided design ensures that they are well ventilated, facilitating smoke venting and minimising smoke logging in the event of fire. SCDF conducts checks on hawker centres on an ad hoc basis in response to feedback from the public as well as other government agencies such as NEA. Over the past three years, SCDF conducted 13 such checks on hawker centres. This is on top of routine inspections conducted by the NEA and the Town Councils, and servicing conducted by their appointed contractors which

ensure the exhaust systems and ducts are well maintained and in good working order.

Common causes of hawker centre fires are the accumulation of grease within poorly-maintained kitchen exhaust ducts which ignite during the cooking process, stallholders leaving their cooking unattended, and forgetting to switch off appliances at the end of the day.

There were 32 hawker centre fires from January 2015 to July 2017. There were no fatalities. Five of these cases resulted in casualties and the fires were mainly caused by overheating because of unattended cooking. This could have been prevented. SCDF has also conducted comprehensive inspections to ensure the fire safety of these affected hawker centres.

A large number of hawker centre fires can be prevented. As part of its Community Emergency Preparedness Programme, SCDF partners NEA to educate stallholders on how to prevent and respond to fire emergencies. SCDF has also implemented mitigating measures to reduce the risk of fires in hawker centres. For instance, SCDF, with HDB and the Town Councils, have worked together to replace all individual LPG cylinders in hawker centres with safer centralised LPG pipeline manifold systems or Town Gas.

Hawker centre owners and stallholders also have a part to play. They can prevent fires by thoroughly cleaning their kitchen exhaust ducts at least once a year, not leaving cooking unattended, and switching off all appliances when they leave for the day.

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## COMPLAINTS OF CIGARETTE SMOKE DRIFTING INTO NEIGHBOURING HOUSES

35 **Er Dr Lee Bee Wah** asked the Minister for Law in the past two years (a) how many disputes concerning cigarette smoke from neighbouring units drifting into adjacent houses have been referred to the Community Mediation Centres; and (b) of these conflicts, how many have been resolved and what have been the terms of the resolution.

**Mr K Shanmugam:** From January 2015 to May 2017, only two cases involving neighbour disputes concerning cigarette smoke were referred by the Courts to the Community Mediation Centre (CMC). In the same period, there were 45 such cases which were voluntarily registered by an aggrieved party directly at the CMC. That makes 47 cases of neighbour disputes involving cigarette smoke registered at the CMC in total. This is less than 2% of all cases registered at the

CMC during the same period.

As mediation is a voluntary process, mediation can be proceeded with only if both parties agree to mediate. Of the 47 cases that were registered, 8 cases proceeded to mediation. All 8 cases which proceeded to mediation were successfully resolved at the CMC.

The terms of settlement included: (a) the respondent agreeing to reduce the frequency of smoking, (b) the respondent agreeing to take measures to prevent cigarette smoke from drifting into neighbouring units, and (c) the respondent agreeing to be contacted directly by the complainant if smoke drifted in from the respondent's unit.

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## **PIONEER GENERATION PACKAGE COVERAGE FOR TRADITIONAL CHINESE SERVICES**

36 **Miss Cheryl Chan Wei Ling** asked the Minister for Health (a) whether there are any plans for traditional Chinese medicine services to be included under the coverage of the Pioneer Generation Package (PGP); and (b) whether Medisave incentives can be given to pioneer generation members who do not use any PGP subsidies within a calendar year as an encouragement for staying healthy.

**Mr Gan Kim Yong:** There are currently no plans to extend Pioneer Generation (PG) subsidies to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), which plays a complementary role in our healthcare system. PG subsidies are meant to help Pioneers with part of their healthcare costs in hospitals, polyclinics and GP clinics. MOH provides support for TCM development in various ways including funding and support for TCM capability development, continuing education and research. Charitable TCM establishments with Institution of Public Character (IPC) status also benefit from tax exemption and are eligible to receive tax deductible donations, which enable them to provide affordable TCM services in the community.

Under the PG package, all Pioneers receive life-long annual Medisave top-ups of up to \$800, depending on the year they were born. Pioneers who stay healthy will be able to save more of these Medisave top-ups for their future needs. More importantly, staying healthy will enable them to age well and lead an active life.

To help them do so, we have several measures to encourage our Pioneers to stay healthy.

For example, the Health Promotion Board encourages Pioneers to do regular physical activity through the “You Can Get Moving” campaign. Another measure is the enhanced Screen for Life programme. From 1 September 2017, Pioneers can receive free health screening and the first follow-up consult when they go for recommended screenings.

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### **INCREASING TEST LABORATORIES' AND GPS' DATA SUBMISSION IN NATIONAL ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD**

37 **Ms Joan Pereira** asked the Minister for Health whether the Ministry will consider (i) requiring all laboratories to participate in the National Electronic Health Record system to upload patients' test results and (ii) providing trained personnel to general practitioners to encourage and assist them to participate in the system.

**Mr Gan Kim Yong:** Data contribution to the National Electronic Health Record (NEHR) is currently voluntary for all private healthcare licensees and the Ministry of Health (MOH) has been reaching out to healthcare providers to encourage participation. To enhance patient safety and continuity of care, MOH is looking to mandate under the new Healthcare Services Bill that all licensed healthcare providers, including clinical laboratories, contribute data to the NEHR.

In the meantime, public consultations are ongoing. Dedicated teams have been set up and trained to engage various groups of licensees, including laboratories, hospitals and general practitioners, to better understand their concerns and needs, and provide relevant support and assistance. We are also working with IT providers supporting Clinical Laboratories, Hospitals and GPS, to enable connections with NEHR.

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### **INCREASING PUBLIC BUS CAPACITY ON ROUTES FROM MAJOR MRT INTERCHANGES TO SCHOOLS, BUSINESS PARKS AND PUBLIC HOSPITALS DURING PEAK PERIODS**

38 **Miss Cheryl Chan Wei Ling** asked the Minister for Transport (a) whether he can provide an update on the capacity of public bus services to meet demand and users' waiting time from 2014-2017; and (b) whether studies will be conducted for on-demand public bus services

that ply routes from major MRT interchanges to schools, business parks and public hospitals to ease capacity during peak hours.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** Under the Bus Service Enhancement Programme (BSEP), we committed to add 1000 buses, bringing the total public bus fleet to about 5,500. To date, 960 buses and 76 bus routes have been added. The remaining 40 buses will be added by the end of the year. Consequently, commuters are enjoying shorter waiting times and less crowded buses. The maximum headway during peak periods has shortened from 20 minutes to 15 minutes for all bus services, and from 8 to 6 minutes for feeder bus services. Average loading has also eased for almost 90% of bus services.

LTA will be trialling on-demand public bus services at selected areas during off-peak hours early next year. The trial will inform on whether such services are suitable for more widespread deployment, including during peak periods.

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## **IMPROVE APPROVAL PROCESS FOR PUBLIC BUS SERVICE ROUTE DIVERSIONS**

39 **Mr Melvin Yong Yik Chye** asked the Minister for Transport whether LTA will review the approval process for public bus service route diversions so that the public transport operators can better respond to traffic conditions.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** Bus operators are currently required to seek LTA's approval before proceeding with route diversions. This is to ensure that buses are not diverted unnecessarily, thereby inconveniencing commuters on board. LTA typically grants approvals within 15 minutes. Should the road be impassable, bus operators have the autonomy to proceed with route diversion, LTA reviews this process periodically.

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## **WITHDRAWAL OF NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL GRANT OR 'STATE OF EMERGENCY' BOOK**

40 **Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong** asked the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth how do the contents in the book "State of Emergency" deviate from the original proposal of the author



which allegedly led to the National Arts Council withdrawing its grant.

**Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien:** The final manuscript NAC received bore little resemblance to the proposal that was originally submitted. The proposal which NAC agreed to fund was for a historical novel set mainly in 1965, to explore a period when Singapore was trying to find a new identity. The proposed title was ‘MacDonald House’. The final manuscript significantly deviated from the proposal in terms of the plotline and the bulk of the novel was not set in 1965 or the years surrounding Singapore’s independence. It thus did not comply with the terms and conditions of the funding agreement, and the funding was discontinued the following year in 2011.

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## **MONITORING SKILLSFUTURE COURSES UNDERTAKEN BY PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT AGE SEGMENTS**

43 **Mr Chong Kee Hiong** asked the Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) with regard to the SkillsFuture programme (a) whether the Ministry monitors the general categories of courses taken by the different age segments and, if so, what is the breakdown; (b) whether there are regular checks of how courses are marketed; and (c) how does the Government ensure that course providers do not enrol students who lack basic qualifying criteria such as language competency, education background or work experience to benefit from the courses.

**Mr Ong Ye Kung:** The SkillsFuture Credit was launched in January 2016 to empower Singaporeans to take charge of their training and learning journeys. More than 126,000 Singaporeans used their credits in 2016.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) courses were the most popular courses for all age groups. Younger Singaporeans enrolled for courses on emerging ICT skills such as data analytics, while older Singaporeans learnt more fundamental ICT skills such as using the basic functions of a computer. Other popular areas of training include Productivity and Innovation, and Security and Investigation.

SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) conducts routine checks to ensure that courses are marketed in line with guidelines.

The SkillsFuture Credit course directory includes information on minimum requirements

for course registration, where relevant. Nonetheless, while some training providers may set basic qualifying criteria for their courses, we do not require that they do so for all courses, as this may limit Singaporeans' access to training which they might otherwise find useful.

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## **WAIVE SEASON PARKING CHARGES FOR EDUCATORS WHO WORK IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING**

44 **Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar** asked the Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) whether the Ministry can review the need to charge season parking fees for educators teaching in institutions of higher learning and who drive their cars to these institutions.

**Mr Ong Ye Kung:** In recent years, the Auditor-General had highlighted that several Institutions of Higher Learning did not charge market rate for the use of their car parks. Such practices were tantamount to providing hidden subsidies for vehicle parking. The practice is therefore not in line with the Civil Service's philosophy of a clean wage, where public officers get a salary, with no hidden benefits.

The Institute of Technical Education and the polytechnics have therefore carried out an internal review of their staff parking rates, and revised the rates to comply with the clean wage policy which requires that car park rates be determined in accordance with market value. Thus, they will be revising the rates to peg them to those charged at the nearest alternative car park – typically the HDB estate.

MOE, students and the public all appreciate the service and contribution of our educators. They have a heavy responsibility, an important mission to fulfil, which most carry out with passion and dedication. We recognise the contributions of education in various ways, but when it comes to car park charges, it is best not to deviate from a longstanding civil service policy.

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## **SCHEMES TO ENCOURAGE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION AMONGST YOUNG WORKING ADULTS**

45 **Mr Darryl David** asked the Minister for Trade and Industry (Industry) what schemes are in place to encourage more entrepreneurship and innovation, specifically among young working adults.

**Mr S Iswaran:** Singapore's startup ecosystem has seen significant progress over the past decade. The total number of startups doubled from 22,000 in 2003 to 43,000 in 2016. In particular, the number of technology startups has increased from 2,800 to 4,300 over the same period. Entrepreneurship is also increasingly recognised as a viable pathway alongside many other career options. A global entrepreneur survey<sup>1</sup> conducted in 2016 found that 74% of the Singapore-based respondents aged 18 to 30 years old intended to either start their own business or become self-employed in the next 10 years.

Young working adults and other budding entrepreneurs keen to start their own businesses can tap on a wide range of available support schemes under SPRING's Startup SG framework. The framework consolidates the Government's startup programmes for budding entrepreneurs to easily identify the schemes most relevant to their needs to help them develop and scale their ideas.

Under the Startup SG framework, first-time entrepreneurs can tap on the Startup SG Founder scheme which provides funding support by matching \$3 for every \$1 raised by the entrepreneur, up to \$30,000. The scheme matches successful applicants with mentors who provide guidance and connections to business networks, in order to help the startups accelerate their growth.

Entrepreneurs embarking on technology startups can tap on the Startup SG Tech grant, which supports the commercialisation of proprietary technology solutions. Startup SG Equity catalyses additional funding from the private sector by co-investing in startups with third-party investors. More information on the schemes and their areas of support can be found on the Startup SG website.

In addition to the Startup SG schemes, the private sector has stepped up to play a role. For example, the Action Community for Entrepreneurship (ACE) organises networking sessions, workshops, and professional services clinics to help budding entrepreneurs and startups. ACE further facilitates peer mentoring and support by bringing together entrepreneurs of similar profiles to share their experiences and learn from one another through its Peer Group programme.

Singaporeans aged 25 and above who are keen on becoming entrepreneurs can also tap on

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<sup>1</sup> Source: The Entrepreneur Era, Global Entrepreneur Survey 2016, conducted by GoDaddy and Morar Consulting.

their SkillsFuture Credit to undertake eligible courses on entrepreneurship and innovation. These courses can be found on the SkillsFuture course directory.

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## UPGRADING TOUR GUIDE SKILLS AND TOURIST PROGRAMMES

46 **Mr Desmond Choo** asked the Minister for Trade and Industry (Industry) in view of the launch of "Passion Made Possible" (a) how is the Ministry working with tour guides to upgrade their skills to thrive in the new strategy; and (b) how will the Ministry work with local retailers to enhance the tourist experience and improve retail sales.

**Mr S Iswaran:** Tourists today seek immersive, hands-on and authentic local experiences. They are keen to explore a destination's offerings, whether in terms of its rich food heritage, diverse cultures or unique precincts.

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) launched the Passion Made Possible brand in collaboration with the Economic Development Board (EDB), to tell the story of Singapore and Singaporeans. We wanted to bring out Singapore's uniqueness as a destination, by sharing our experiences and achievements with the world. This will help to attract tourists who are increasingly drawn to experiential travel, complementing our established reputation as a vibrant, safe and multicultural destination.

Tourist Guides (TGs) play an important role because today's tourists have the best experiences when their travel is facilitated by people with deep knowledge of local experiences and products. Our TGs must be able to conduct immersive and interest-based tours, and have strong storytelling capabilities. STB has been working with training providers to offer Professional Development Courses for TGs to strengthen their knowledge and skills. STB has also worked with tour operators to curate or refresh more than 20 tours, incorporating stories linked to the Passion Made Possible brand.

We are also taking steps to apply the new brand to the retail sector. Tourists today increasingly seek out locally designed products and learn about the people who created them – that is, how passion is made possible among local retailers. Some of our local product makers and retailers receive support from SPRING Singapore to grow their brands and capabilities. To feature Singapore's local brands and designers more prominently, STB and SPRING have

collaborated with JTC Corporation to develop a Singapore Designers Showcase (SDS) dedicated to profiling the best of our local designers and their individual brand stories. This will be sited at the heart of Orchard Road and ready in 2018.

To enable our local retailers and brands to tell better stories and deliver memorable experiences for visitors, STB has also set aside grants such as the Experience Step-Up Fund. Local retailers and brands can use this fund to develop unique keepsakes for tourists or enhance retail experience for shoppers, to encouraging spending in Singapore.

To generate more buzz for retailers, STB is working with strategic industry partners to anchor marquee retail-centric events along Orchard Road such as the Star Wars – Experience the Force Event in collaboration with The Walt Disney Company (Southeast Asia) and F1 Pit Stop @ Orchard, where attendees can participate in unique themed activities and purchase exclusive merchandise.

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## SOUTHERN ISLANDS AS NATIONAL PARKS

47 **Mr Christopher de Souza** asked the Minister for National Development how can the Southern Islands be made more accessible as national parks so that more Singaporeans can enjoy them and their rustic charm and rich biodiversity can still be preserved.

**Mr Lawrence Wong:** The Southern Islands comprise seven islets south of Sentosa island. Apart from Pulau Tekukor, all are accessible for recreational activities. In fact, many visitors already enjoy these beaches, rustic landscapes, and dive spots. These islands are accessible via commercial ferry services from Marina South Pier or through chartered yachts.

We have recently designated the Sisters' Islands Marine Park, comprising the two Sisters' Islands, their surrounding waters, and the western reefs of Pulau Tekukor and St John's Island, as a public park under the Parks and Trees Act. This affords greater protection to key biodiversity hotspots within the Southern Islands.

NParks has introduced guided intertidal walks and dive trails and will be facilitating visits for schools, institutes, and organisations to the Sisters' Islands Marine Park. We will also add infrastructure to make Big Sister's Island more accessible. For example, NParks is sensitively developing a boardwalk, intertidal pools, and a floating pontoon there. Rules will be put in place

for the Marine Park so that different activities can co-exist harmoniously.

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### MEASURES TO DETER FEEDING OF PIGEONS

48 **Mr Gan Thiam Poh** asked the Minister for National Development what further measures will the Ministry take to deter feeding of pigeons by the public.

**Mr Lawrence Wong:** AVA and NEA work together to take enforcement action against pigeon feeders. The agencies conduct surveillance at identified feeding hotspots. AVA has installed cameras at these hotspots to better monitor pigeon feeding activities. AVA has also worked with several Town Councils to put up notices to ask for information about feeding activities. This information helps AVA target their enforcement operations effectively. Members of the public who are caught feeding pigeons can be fined up to \$500. For littering, offenders can be fined up to \$2,000 upon their first conviction. They may also serve a Corrective Work Order (CWO).

Enforcement alone will not solve this problem. We need to raise public awareness that pigeon feeding dirties our living environment and potentially affects public health. AVA, NEA and Town Councils work together to educate residents through advisories, posters and events. The community and grassroots leaders can also help to spread this message.

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### COST OF ON-BOARDING SOCIAL SERVICE OFFICES AND MINISTRY-SUPPORTED VWOS TO SOCIAL SERVICE NET

50 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development (a) what is the cost of on-boarding social service offices (SSOs) and Ministry-supported VWOs to Social Service Net (SSNet); (b) what is the timeline for the adoption of SSNet; and (c) what are the initial indications of the impact of SSNet on SSOs and VWOs in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.

**Mr Desmond Lee:** The Social Service Net (SSNet) was developed by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and the Government Technology Agency (GovTech) as an integrated case management system for the social service sector.

Conceptualisation and development of SSNet started in 2013. The rollout to all Social Service Offices (SSOs) and Family Service Centres (FSCs) was completed by February 2016, at a cost of about \$29 million. This amount covered the development and operating cost of the system for the full rollout, network connectivity and software applications to support the ICT-enabling of the social service sector, as well as provision of end user devices to the Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs) that have come on board. SSNet will continue to be extended to other MSF-funded services and programmes, such as the Divorce Support Specialist Agencies, in phases. There are more than 1,500 SSNet users to date.

The SSOs and VWOs have benefited from more efficient information sharing through SSNet. For instance, SSO officers are able to retrieve the ComCare records of any walk-in clients requiring financial assistance, even if these clients had previously visited another SSO, reducing the need for the client to repeat his or her story in full. Also, with the client's consent, the SSOs and FSCs can obtain some client information directly through system link-ups with other agencies, such as the Ministry of Health and the Housing Development Board, reducing the time needed to collect such information and making things more convenient for the client.

To reap these benefits, some standardisation of key business processes have had to be put in place across more than 40 FSCs run by 22 different VWOs. Some FSCs have found the change process more challenging than others, although there is broad agreement that there are clear benefits to having an integrated case management system and baseline practice standards across the sector. MSF regularly engages the FSCs in dialogue, and has worked with the FSCs to address the challenges that some of them have faced post-implementation. We are continually reviewing how SSNet can support our business processes better, so that those in need can be served better.

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## **PARENTS' SICK LEAVE ENTITLEMENT FOR CHILDCARE**

52 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Prime Minister whether the Ministry will consider allowing parents to use their paid sick leave entitlement to care for their sick children or allowing this at least for parents of premature, multiple births or babies with congenital illness.

**Mr Teo Chee Hean (for the Prime Minister):** The Government is strongly committed to

supporting Singaporeans in their aspirations to get married and have children. We empathise with parents who face challenges in looking after children who require more care, and will look into ways to better support them.

Mr Ng has suggested allowing parents to tap on their own paid sick leave entitlement to care for their sick children. Paid sick leave allows an employee to access medical care and recuperate, while protecting his employment status and income during the period of illness. If sick leave is used to also care for children, parents might be caught in difficult situations when they themselves fall ill and have insufficient sick leave to recuperate.

In addition, from the employers' perspective, allowing one leave type to be used for another purpose amounts to increasing overall leave utilisation for selected employees. Therefore, apart from the impact on manpower and operational costs for employers, we should be mindful of the possible impact of such a proposal on the employability of employees with caregiving responsibilities.

Although the number of parents with preterm and multiple births or babies with congenital illnesses remains small, we will seriously consider how we can better support such parents with greater caregiving needs, in addition to existing parental leave provisions which have also been progressively enhanced. I made the same point in my reply to Mr Ng's Adjournment Motion last month on extending parental leave for parents with preterm babies and multiple births.

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## **NUMBER OF SLIP AND FALL WORKPLACE ACCIDENTS IN KITCHENS AND FOOD PREPARATION AREAS**

54 **Mr Melvin Yong Yik Chye** asked the Minister for Manpower (a) what is the number of cases of slip and fall workplace accidents that happened in kitchens and food preparation areas in the past two years; and (b) whether the Ministry will consider including a workplace safety and health module as part of the food hygiene course for food operators and kitchen assistants.

**Mr Lim Swee Say:** In 2015 and 2016, there were 96 and 92 cases of slips, trips and falls accidents in kitchens and food preparation areas. One of them resulted in a fatality while workers in the remaining cases sustained minor injuries. These cases represent approximately 3% of all the slips, trips, and falls cases due to workplace accidents in Singapore.



The Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Council is working with the National Environment Agency (NEA) and SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) to include a topic on kitchen safety in the revised WSQ Basic Food Hygiene Course and Food Hygiene Officer Course by the end of this year. The additional topic would include case studies on the common safety and health hazards encountered in kitchens.

In addition, educational materials, such as guidelines, safety posters, and an Activity-Based-Checklist for slips, trips and falls, are available on the WSH Council website to help companies put in place safety measures to reduce slips, trips, and falls in kitchen and food preparation areas. The Council and tripartite partners will continue to work closely together to promote awareness of good safety practices in kitchen and food preparation areas.

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### **NUMBER OF AMPUTATIONS DUE TO WORKPLACE ACCIDENTS**

55 **Mr Melvin Yong Yik Chye** asked the Minister for Manpower (a) what is the number of amputation cases due to workplace accidents in the past three years; (b) what are the main causes for such cases; and (c) what are the measures taken by the Ministry to reduce the number of such cases.

**Mr Lim Swee Say:** In the past three years, there were 389 amputation cases due to workplace accidents, comprising 129 cases in 2014, 117 in 2015, and 143 in 2016. In the first half of 2017, there were 57 cases. More than 70% of these cases involved the use of industrial machines and tools.

There are three main causes for such accidents. Firstly, the lack of machine guards or safety design in machines. Secondly, employers' failure to put in place adequate safe work procedure. Thirdly, individuals' failure to follow procedures due to ignorance or disregard for safety.

To improve the situation, MOM has adopted a more targeted enforcement operation on machinery safety at workplaces with industrial machines. The inspections will check on machine guards and safety design, as well as companies' procedures for safe machine operation, in addition to other common safety breaches.

MOM, the Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Council and the WSH Institute have also

stepped up engagement efforts. We organize solutioning sessions and seminars on preventing amputations with our tripartite partners, The Council will also produce and disseminate videos on safe machinery. This adds to the suite of materials, including guidelines, case studies, safety cards, and safety posters, that are already available on the WSH Council website.

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### **STRENGTHEN CURRENT E-LEARNING PORTAL FOR SCHOOLS**

57 **Mr Seah Kian Peng** asked the Minister for Education (Schools) what steps will the Ministry take to improve the robustness of the Marshall Cavendish (MC) Online e-learning portal for schools, given the recent severe outage experienced by students.

58 **Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong** asked the Minister for Education (Schools) what measures are being taken to strengthen online learning portals being used in schools against the prospect of outages that may disrupt the learning schedules of students.

**Mr Ng Chee Meng:** Vendors of e-learning portal are required to meet the Service Level and performance requirements stipulated by MOE for schools. Load tests were conducted with these e-learning portals to ensure that they meet the performance requirements.

During the recent incident involving MC Online portal, the system was still operational but users had experienced intermittent slowdown in access speed and login issues. The root cause was found to be due to a limitation in the network equipment that had caused the bandwidth to be capped instead of being scalable when network traffic became heavier. As a result, additional network traffic beyond a certain threshold was dropped and would not reach the MC Online system.

To better support future home-based learning for the students, MOE has taken measures to upgrade existing network equipment. MOE will continue to work with vendors of e-learning portal to ensure that the bandwidth is scalable to meet the service requirements and that bandwidth testing is conducted prior to major activities with anticipated peak loads.

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### **PROPOSAL FOR REHABILITATION PROGRAMME FOR INMATES TO PLAN, PREPARE AND SERVE MEALS TO PUBLIC**

59 **Mr Christopher de Souza** asked the Minister for Home Affairs whether a rehabilitation programme can be implemented for inmates to plan, prepare, cook, and serve meals to the public whereby they can (i) learn ethics, teamwork, culinary and service skills (ii) experience career progression and (iii) earn a food handler certification, valuable trade experience and monetary savings upon their release.

**Mr K Shanmugam:** The Singapore Prison Service (SPS) partners the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE) to provide work and vocational training programmes in prison as part of the overall inmate rehabilitation programme. These work programmes help to keep the inmates meaningfully occupied during their prison term and enhance their work ethic, skills as well as employability upon their release. The work programmes also enable inmates to receive an allowance which is saved in their prison account and can be sent home to their families or withdrawn upon their release.

Food preparation work and training programmes are available in prison. Suitable inmates are emplaced on work and training programmes at the kitchen facilities in prison. Besides preparing food for prison meals, the inmates are trained to prepare meals for external corporate and private functions. The Dining Behind Bars programme also provides opportunities for inmates to prepare and serve meals to invited guests in prison.

The culinary skills training provided within prison is aligned with the Workforce Singapore (WSG) Workforce Skills Qualification (WSQ) framework. The training programmes also simulate the actual work environment to better prepare inmates to readily apply their skills to their future workplaces. Inmates are able to acquire WSQ certifications, which will help them secure better jobs upon their release.

An example of such training is the Hope Café/Training Kitchen located in Changi Prisons. The Hope Café is a kitchen jointly set up by WSG, SPS and SCORE to provide inmates with the opportunities to obtain WSQ Certificates in Culinary Arts and Food & Beverage Operations. Close to 200 inmates are trained at the Hope Café every year.

To support their reintegration, SCORE also assist these trained inmates to find related work in the Food & Beverage industry. This allows inmates to apply the training to their jobs after release.

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## **CURB ILLEGAL GAMBLING IN HDB ESTATES**

60 **Ms Tin Pei Ling** asked the Minister for Home Affairs (a) what is the Ministry's position on illegal gambling in HDB estates; (b) what observations and actions have the authorities made and taken so far; and (c) what further actions will they take to resolve long-standing illegal gambling issues in HDB estates when the authorities' actions do not generate lasting positive outcomes.

**Mr K Shanmugam:** The Police adopt a tough enforcement stance against illegal gambling, whether it takes place in HDB estates or other places.

The illegal gambling situation in Singapore is stable and under control. This is due to our strict laws on gambling. Gambling is prohibited unless specifically allowed by way of an exemption, a licence or a permit. It is an offence to gamble in a public place under the Common Gaming Houses Act and also the Betting Act. Offenders are liable to be fined up to \$5,000, or imprisoned up to six months, or both.

The Police are aware that some residents do gather at the common areas of their HDB estate to engage in gambling activities, and this may create social disamenities to others. When complaints are lodged, the Police will take enforcement action.

However, enforcement alone is not sufficient. To achieve sustainable outcomes, enforcement must be complemented by public education and community partnership. To this end, the Police work closely with grassroots leaders and partners such as the National Crime Prevention Council, to raise public awareness of the consequences of illegal gambling.

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## **DISALLOW ADVERTISEMENTS OF MISLEADING CLAIMS ON GENERAL HEALTH PRODUCTS**

62 **Dr Chia Shi-Lu** asked the Minister for Health regarding products which make specific health claims such as alleviating certain physical symptoms (a) under what conditions will they be included or excluded from regulations under the Health Products Act; and (b) what measures are there to prevent misleading claims and advertisements of general health products.

**Mr Gan Kim Yong:** Currently, western pharmaceutical drugs and medical devices are

regulated under the Health Products Act (HPA). These products are used for the specific purpose of prevention, diagnosis, monitoring, treatment or alleviation of medical conditions and symptoms. Products meant to promote a person's general well-being are not regarded as health products under the HPA, and companies are not allowed to make any claims that these products can prevent, diagnose or treat any medical conditions. Examples include massage equipment and similar devices using electromagnetic waves and electrotherapy to relax muscles and improve blood circulation, as well as devices meant for fitness tracking.

Complementary health products such as traditional medicines and health supplements, which claim to alleviate certain symptoms of disease conditions or enhancing a specific function of the body are regulated under the Medicines Act (MA). Examples include medicated oil and balms for pain relief and glucosamine supplements for joint health.

Under the HPA and MA, false and misleading claims are prohibited. Additionally, there is a list of serious diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and cancer for which advertisements are prohibited. This is to prevent consumers from being misled that a product can treat such diseases which may lead to inappropriate self-medication and delay in seeking necessary medical treatments. Direct advertising to the public of prescription only medicines or medical devices for professional use only is also prohibited.

HSA conducts surveillance on published advertisements. When non-compliant advertisements are detected, the advertisers will be ordered to stop and remove the publication of these advertisements. HSA will also provide them with advice on the regulatory requirements and work with them to rectify non-compliant advertisements. The HPA also empowers HSA to direct the offending party to take such corrective measures as issuing a clarification advertisement to clear up any misleading or false claims in the earlier contravening advertisement. Under the HPA, the maximum penalty for advertising a non-health product as a health product, or advertising a health product in a false or misleading way, is a fine of \$20,000 or imprisonment up to 12 months or both.

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## **MINIMISE MRT TRAIN DELAYS DUE TO SIGNALLING FAULTS**

63 **Mr Lim Biow Chuan** asked the Minister for Transport (a) whether all delays on the MRT train system attributed to signalling faults are thoroughly investigated so as to prevent

future recurrence; (b) whether LTA is satisfied with the response of public transport operators whenever there are train delays or disruption to train services; and (c) whether LTA requires public transport operators to compensate commuters affected by the train delay or disruption.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** All delays – not just those arising from the new signalling system – are thoroughly investigated, and immediate steps taken to prevent a recurrence.

Following any major delay, LTA and the rail operators will activate their incident management plans which include deploying additional staff to affected stations, broadcasting of travel alerts to commuters and the provision of alternative transport options. LTA closely monitors how our public transport operators respond to each incident, to learn the lessons so as to improve the incident management process.

As for compensation, LTA requires the operator to refund the fares of commuters who are forced to exit the train network as they are unable to complete their journeys because of service disruptions. Operators are also required to provide them with free public and bridging bus services.

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## **ENSURING SMOOTH INTEGRATION OF NEW SIGNALLING SYSTEM ON NORTH-SOUTH AND EAST-WEST MRT LINES**

64 **Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong** asked the Minister for Transport (a) whether he can provide an update on the progress of the integration of the new signalling equipment for the North-South and East-West MRT Lines; (b) what is the specific timeline for the completion of the tests and checks required beyond the description of "a few months" indicated in LTA/SMRT's press release; and (c) what are the lessons learnt from the train disruptions that have occurred during this integration that may assist to improve service recovery measures for similar future breakdowns.

65 **Mr Pritam Singh** asked the Minister for Transport (a) what arrangements are in place to facilitate the smooth implementation of the communications-based train control (CBTC) signalling system on the North-South and East-West MRT Lines; and (b) what operational constraints, challenges and hazards have arisen from the concurrent usage of the CBTC signalling system between Pioneer and Tuas Link on the East-West Line and on the entire North-

South Line with the older Westinghouse fixed-block signalling system on the remaining stations of the East-West Line.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** Installing a new signalling system is a complex exercise. For the entire North-South and East-West Lines, re-signalling will entail the installation of new equipment in more than 95 kilometres of train tracks, 141 trains, 54 stations and three train depots. This involves thousands of individual radio devices, more than 1,600 kilometres of communication and control cables, and the end-to-end rewiring of 4 different train models to accommodate the new hardware. That, however, is still the relatively easier part of the project.

The more challenging part is to integrate the new signalling system to work properly with the other rail systems, whilst the North-South and East-West Lines remain operational. It is akin to implanting a new central nervous system to a living body, whilst ensuring that the other organs continue to function. The London Underground, which also undertook such a re-signalling project a few years ago, took almost a year for its new system to stabilise. They were the first to warn us of these challenges, and I had shared their painful experience in this House early in the year. This was despite them implementing more than a hundred partial line closures to facilitate installation and testing.

For us, closing the North-South or East-West Line is not an option. These two lines account for more than two million rides daily. We need to continue to operate the legacy signalling system even as we install and test the new system. The Member alluded to the complexity of keeping both signalling systems operational. This is indeed the case.

SMRT, LTA and system supplier Thales have therefore taken a cautious and progressive approach to installing and testing the new signalling system. I have advised them earlier to not rush this project. We started with more than 1,300 tests conducted during non-service hours, running empty trains. It was useful: glitches were discovered and software patches were duly installed and re-tested. After we were satisfied with these tests, we embarked on testing under “live” conditions, with trains loaded with commuters. Even then, we started small, with off-peak testing during the last hour of service from March 28th, and full Sunday testing from April 16th. During full Sunday testing, we also ramped up the frequency of trains to mirror weekday conditions. New glitches were discovered and more software patches installed and re-tested.

Again, only after we were fully satisfied with these second and third phases of testing did

we embark on full-weekday testing from May 28th. Full-weekday testing is necessary to stress the system under typical peak hour conditions, when trains run at high frequencies with heavy commuter loads. But again, to be extra careful, we scheduled the start of testing to coincide with the June school holidays, when commuter traffic was lighter. We are now at the tail end of this phase of testing for the North-South Line.

Despite our best efforts, commuters have had to endure some service delays, as forewarned by the London Underground. Nevertheless, the implementation has been smoother than what we feared. The prolonged testing and progressive stressing of the system has generally paid off. While it has not eliminated delays, it has minimised them.

As for project timeline, we are currently focused on stabilising the North-South Line. We have seen promising results from the latest software installed on July 14th. We expect to complete testing for the North-South Line before December. Testing of the East-West Line will then commence, for completion next year. The software improvements and lessons learnt from the North-South Line will be carried over to the East-West Line.

The new signalling system will be a significant upgrade from the legacy system used since 1987. Once stabilised, train services will be more reliable. We can increase the number of trains to be deployed on the network, leading to shorter waiting times for commuters. However, much work remains to be done. I seek the public's continued patience and support.

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## **SKILLSFUTURE CREDIT FOR EMPLOYERS AND BUSINESSES**

66 **Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan** asked the Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) whether his Ministry will consider having a SkillsFuture credit for employers and businesses for the benefit of SMEs and start-ups in the area of continuing education and training for their employees.

**Mr Ong Ye Kung:** The Government has always recognised the need to give SMEs additional help in building up human capital capabilities.

Hence, there are currently many training subsidies and grants available to firms. Under the "Enhanced Training Support for SMEs" scheme administered by SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG), SMEs receive up to 90% course fee subsidies and absentee payroll funding when they sponsor



their employees for training. Firms can also tap on SSG's training grants for in-house training programmes.

SMEs can also tap on SPRING's "Capability Development Grant in Human Capital Development" to develop learning processes, training roadmaps and training frameworks for their employees. Firms can also benefit from the external insight and in-depth mentorship provided by the expert mentors under SPRING's "SkillsFuture SME Mentors Programme". These mentors will help to diagnose gaps in the company's learning and development initiatives, review and enhance existing training plans, as well as monitor and coach companies' supervisors or managers in their training delivery.

For individuals, SkillsFuture Credit triggered their desire to upgrade. But unlike individuals, businesses operating in a competitive environment should always be eager to improve and raise their game. It is better to support SMEs through more targeted programmes and schemes, than to provide SMEs with a SkillsFuture Credit.

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## **INCENTIVES TO TRANSLATE GOVERNMENT-FUNDED RESEARCH INTO INDUSTRY APPLICATIONS AND COMMERCIALISATION**

67 **Ms Foo Mee Har** asked the Minister for Trade and Industry (Industry) what incentive schemes have been put in place for researchers and academics tapping on the Research, Innovation and Enterprise 2020 research funding to accelerate translation of research into industry applications and commercialisation.

**Mr S Iswaran:** Since the launch of our first \$2 billion National Technology Plan in 1991, Singapore has built up a strong base of R&D capabilities through steady and consistent investments. In 2015, Gross Expenditure on R&D (GERD) reached a new high of \$9.5 billion, an increase of 11.8% from 2014. Our Research Scientists and Engineers (RSE) talent pool similarly reached a new high of 35,000 in 2015, up 6.6% from 2014.

We are now making several shifts under the \$19 billion Research, Innovation and Enterprise (RIE) 2020 plan to accelerate the translation of research into industry applications and economic value. This will ensure that Singapore is well-positioned to harness our RIE investments to drive the next phase of our economic growth.

First, to tighten the linkages between our R&D capabilities and industry needs, we have increased the Industry Alignment Fund (IAF) from \$1.61 billion in RIE2015 to \$1.75 billion in RIE2020. This fund supports our public researchers for collaborations with companies<sup>2</sup>, including MNCs, large local enterprises as well as SMEs and startups, on research projects with potential economic impact. Companies provide both cash and in-kind contributions to show that they value the R&D conducted.

Second, we have enhanced support for public researchers to develop their upstream intellectual property (IP) into prototypes through Gap Funds<sup>3</sup>, which support smaller, early stage projects with disruptive technological potential, as well as larger projects for market validation of technology. Such translational R&D projects help to de-risk the commercialisation pathway of our public sector IP, and facilitate the adoption of such IP by industry. One indicator of the increasing uptake of public sector IP by industry, is that A\*STAR issued over 1,000 licenses to companies under RIE2015, four times the number under S&T2010.

Third, public agencies are developing an IP Framework to harmonise the management and utilisation of public sector IP. This will enhance the speed and certainty of the licensing process to encourage companies to license public sector IP. The framework also incentivises public researchers to actively seek out commercialisation opportunities through the sharing of financial returns with the inventors of the IP.

Finally, public researchers who wish to spin off their IP into startups can access a comprehensive spectrum of support. As a first step, Innovation and Enterprise Offices (IEOs) provide public researchers with mentorship and training in business development skills, advice on IP rights, and access to platforms and networks that link them to potential investors. Public researchers who go on to establish startups can tap on Startup SG grants and equity co-investments with private sector partners, as well as co-working space, lab facilities and mentoring support from public and corporate incubators such as A\*StartCentral. An example of a local startup supported by A\*StartCentral is MiRXES (pronounced MER-REXUS), which develops diagnostic test kits for the early detection of gastric cancer and breast cancer. Spun out by A\*STAR researchers, MiRXES successfully secured funding through A\*StartCentral's

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<sup>2</sup> Under RIE2015, we successfully catalyzed \$1.6 billion of industry R&D spending through the IAF, exceeding our target of \$1 billion.

<sup>3</sup> From \$180 million in RIE2015 to \$310 million in RIE2020.

investment-onboarding programme to link up startups with committed investors. MiRXES is now planning to expand its manufacturing facility in Singapore to supply overseas markets.

The Government will closely monitor these initiatives to promote the commercialisation of our R&D, and make adjustments or introduce new programmes based on the outcomes achieved and feedback from industry.

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## **FINANCIAL LOSS RECORDED IN HDB'S ANNUAL REPORT**

68 **Mr Ong Teng Koon** asked the Minister for National Development whether the provision of \$625 million for foreseeable loss relating to properties under development, as announced in HDB's annual report for FY2017, relates to housing subsidies that are being given to Singaporeans and whether he can give the assurance that these subsidies are being allocated to those who need it the most.

**Mr Lawrence Wong:** The provision of \$625 million for foreseeable loss for properties under development or for sale is the estimated loss that HDB expects to incur for Build-To-Order (BTO) projects awarded in the financial year ended 31 March 2017, including from housing subsidies given to new flat buyers. HDB makes a development loss on the BTO programme, as BTO flats are heavily subsidised. BTO flats are sold with a generous discount to their assessed market values, and this means that selling prices can be significantly below the cost of developing these flats.

To ensure that housing subsidies are given to Singaporean families who need them most, HDB has put in place eligibility conditions, such as nationality, income ceiling and non-ownership of private residential property requirements for access to new HDB flats. In addition, HDB provides means-tested grants to eligible first-timer households through the Additional CPF Housing Grant and Special CPF Housing Grant. These subsidies are targeted at lower- to middle-income Singaporeans, with the lower-income receiving more help.

We will continue to calibrate our housing subsidies progressively and judiciously, to ensure that public housing remains affordable to Singaporeans.

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## **REVIEW LEASE PERIOD OF FLEXI SCHEME FOR FLATS**

69 **Mr Zainal Sapari** asked the Minister for National Development whether HDB will review the 2-room Flexi Scheme to allow the lease period to cover the elderly citizens and their spouses up to the age of 85 years old instead of the current 95 years old.

**Mr Lawrence Wong:** Under the 2-room Flexi Scheme, elderly flat buyers aged 55 and above can choose a lease period of between 15 and 45 years, in 5-year increments, as long as the lease can cover them and their spouse up to the age of at least 95 years. This requirement helps to address concerns about these elderly flat owners out-living their flat leases, and gives them better assurance that the flat can last them for the rest of their life.

There are currently no plans to reduce this requirement to age 85 years. Households who have alternative housing arrangements and no longer need their short-lease 2-room Flexi flat can return the flat to HDB, and receive a refund of the value of the unused portion of the lease.

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### **CHECKS ON DONEES IN LASTING POWER OF ATTORNEY FOR SINGLES TO PREVENT FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION**

70 **Ms K Thanalethimi** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development in respect of a Lasting Power of Attorney drawn up by singles, whether the Ministry has plans to audit and check on their donees for financial exploitation.

**Mr Desmond Lee:** We recognise that a fair number of our elderly are singles. They may be more vulnerable to financial exploitation should they lose capacity.

It is important for each of us to choose our donee carefully, and consider what powers we intend to give, when we make a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA). We should appoint someone reliable and competent, someone we trust to act in our best interests should we lose the capacity to make decisions. This is probably the most important safeguard a single person can take.

However, it might not always be possible for singles to find a family member or someone they know and trust to be their donee. This is why the Mental Capacity Act (MCA) was amended in March 2016 to introduce the concept of professional deputies and donees. As these persons provide doneeship and deputyship services for remuneration, they will be supervised by the Public Guardian. We will audit and check on them.

In addition, the MCA has existing safeguards to protect donors. Anyone who knows, suspects or believes that a person who lacks capacity is being mistreated can report this to the Office of the Public Guardian. The MCA has a 'whistle-blower' clause to protect the identity of a whistle-blower. If there is evidence that the donee has acted in a way which compromises the donor's best interest, including exploiting the donor financially, the Public Guardian would investigate the matter. Where necessary, the Public Guardian would apply to Court for a suspension order to preserve the donor's assets and remove the rogue donee by revoking the LPA.

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### **CASES WHERE GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE WAS STOPPED DUE TO MONEY RAISED THROUGH ONLINE CROWDFUNDING**

71 **Assoc Prof Daniel Goh Pei Siong** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development (a) how many cases have there been in the past three years where social assistance or medical subsidies were stopped or applications rejected because the recipients raised money through online crowdfunding; (b) whether the Ministry inquired into the reasons for the recipients turning to online crowdfunding and, if so, what were the reasons; and (c) whether online crowdfunding is threatening to disrupt the charity sector.

**Mr Desmond Lee:** We are aware of two cases where clients raised money through online crowdfunding, and their applications for social or healthcare assistance were turned down because the applicants' households were assessed to have sufficient resources after taking into account the donations raised. In both cases, the applicants had received government assistance before.

All individuals and households applying for assistance are treated equally. Applications are assessed holistically, taking into account the financial, social and health circumstances of the household. Government assistance is available for all persons and families who are vulnerable and need help. We are not aware of the reasons why the two individuals chose to raise funds through online crowdfunding.

Crowdfunding enables those who need help to actively reach out to, and seek assistance from a wider public. While we are heartened to see many Singaporeans stepping forward to help

others in need, we also have some concerns with certain online crowdfunding practices.

For instance, there have been cases where individuals present inaccurate information online to raise funds, including denying that they have received Government assistance. Should there be more crowdfunding cases discovered to have exploited the generosity of donors, the public may become sceptical towards worthy fund-raising initiatives. This may dampen the charitable spirit, and would run counter to our goal to nurture a gracious and compassionate society.

As crowdfunding platforms enable fund-raisers to reach a much wider audience within a shorter time-span, it is not surprising that online fund-raising has been gaining traction. The benefits of technology will definitely be accompanied with certain pitfalls. With crowdfunding platforms becoming more popular, the charity sector will also need to evolve and adapt accordingly.

It is paramount that the principles of transparency and accountability are adhered to in crowdfunding. The Office of the Commissioner of Charities has highlighted that fund-raisers are obliged to provide clear and accurate information to the public about the beneficiaries and the purpose of these fund-raising appeals. They should keep proper records of donations received and disbursed, and ensure that donations are used in accordance with the intent communicated to the public. In the case of online crowdfunding platforms, information should be disclosed to the public about their status as commercial entities, the proportion of donations which will be given to the intended beneficiaries, and how their fees are computed such as details of transaction charges, if any.

It is encouraging to know that some online crowdfunding platforms have shown efforts to ensure that the causes for which they are fund-raising are legitimate, and taken more effort to conduct due diligence checks to help donors discern the credibility of beneficiaries as part of their duty to donors. However, not all crowdfunding platforms conduct such checks. I strongly urge all crowdfunding platforms to put in place measures to validate the legitimacy of beneficiaries and ensure that donations are used responsibly. This will certainly enhance public confidence in donors to such online fund-raising appeals.

At the same time, donors also have an important role to play. Donors should remain vigilant and discerning in responding to online fund-raising appeals, so as to avoid falling victim to improper fund-raising activities. How will the donations be used? How are records of

donations received and funds disbursed maintained? How are unused funds being accounted for? Will the fund-raiser be receiving any commission from my donation? These are some important questions that donors should ask. When in doubt, donors should find out more from the fund-raisers before making a donation. At no time should anyone feel pressured to give. If donors have concerns regarding any improper fund-raising activities, they should report the matter to the Office of the Commissioner of Charities. If fraud or scams are suspected, donors should file a Police report immediately.

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### **TIGHTENING IT SECURITY MANAGEMENT IN LIGHT OF LAPSES HIGHLIGHTED IN AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT**

72 **Assoc Prof Daniel Goh Pei Siong** asked the Prime Minister whether the Government will consider having the Cyber Security Agency to lead a whole-of-government exercise to review and tighten IT security management and monitoring in light of the Auditor-General's findings on lapses in IT security at several agencies, especially those handling sensitive personal and financial information.

**Mr Lee Hsien Loong:** The Cyber Security Agency oversees national cybersecurity strategy, operations, and ecosystem development. CSA works closely with regulators across eleven sectors to protect Critical Information Infrastructure from cyber threats. Among the eleven sectors, GovTech oversees the Government sector.

In its report released on 18 July 2017, the Auditor-General's Office observed weaknesses in IT controls in four agencies. As far as we are aware, these lapses did not lead to any compromise of data or cybersecurity breach. The agencies will follow up with corrective action.

To safeguard our systems and the data within, we regularly update and strengthen our IT policies.

We conduct regular internal audits across the public service to identify shortcomings for remediation. Going forward, we will increase the number of audits, especially for the more critical and sensitive systems.

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### **CONVERT ATMS TO SERVE CUSTOMERS OF ANY BANK AND**

## MAINTAINING BANK ACCOUNTS WITH LOW AMOUNTS OF CASH DEPOSITS

73 **Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan** asked the Prime Minister whether MAS will consider converting all Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) to be usable by all major banks in Singapore and all of their customers instead of each bank building its own ATM network and customers having to search for ATMs of their banks resulting in duplication of capital, resources and customer inconvenience.

74 **Mr Ang Wei Neng** asked the Prime Minister how will the Ministry make it easier for residents to open and maintain bank accounts with low amounts of cash deposit.

**Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam (for the Prime Minister):** According to World Bank estimates<sup>4</sup>, 96% of Singapore residents above the age of 15 have bank accounts. The figure would be higher for adults. Another source of information comes from the GST Voucher Scheme. About 40,000 Singaporeans have encashed the cheques they receive under the scheme, which could be because they do not have bank accounts.

To make it easy and affordable for Singaporeans to open bank accounts, major retail banks have offered Basic Banking Accounts or BBAs since 2002. While the exact features differ from bank to bank, these BBAs generally operate like normal savings accounts and offer unlimited ATM transactions, access to internet and mobile banking services.

The cost of opening and maintaining a BBA is very low. An individual needs only an initial deposit of \$20, sometimes even less. For instance, DBS/POSB does not require any initial deposit for the opening of its POSB Everyday Savings Account. The bank also waives the account balance fall-below service fee for children, the elderly, full-time National Servicemen and recipients of public assistance.

Nonetheless, some Singaporeans remain unbanked. This may be due to low awareness of the availability of BBAs or by choice. The move towards electronic payments has necessitated a fresh look into our efforts to encourage Singaporeans to set up bank accounts. This needs to be

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<sup>4</sup> World Bank (2015), "The Global Findex Database 2014: Measuring Financial Inclusion around the World." The World Bank drew on survey data collected in the 2014 Gallup World Poll.



done on a national basis, with the government working in partnership with the banks, retail merchants, and community leaders.

As a start, MAS will work with banks and community leaders to run outreach programmes, through community clubs, RCs and senior citizen centres, to assist those without a bank account to open an account.

There is also a significant group, mostly the elderly, who have a bank account but rely primarily on cash to perform transactions. For this group, we want to help them acquire the basic skills, as well as the confidence, to perform simple electronic transactions. IMDA has implemented the Silver Infocomm Initiative to promote IT awareness and literacy, including use of electronic transactions, among seniors aged 50 and above. To date, about 130,000 seniors have benefitted from the program. SkillsFuture Singapore will be running a national programme, called SkillsFuture for Digital Workplace, to help anyone gain confidence in the use of technology, including using mobile banking apps, signing up for PayNow, and making electronic payments. MAS will work with the industry and community leaders to further expand on these public outreach and education efforts.

The purpose of encouraging electronic payments is to bring about greater convenience for everyone. Electronic payments must therefore offer clear benefits over cash for consumers and merchants. They should be simple to use, cheap, and accepted everywhere. When we achieve that, the need to go to an ATM will be far less, and this will greatly benefit the seniors. One can just go directly to his or her favorite hawker stall and pay electronically with a card, mobile phone, or even a watch.

Our agencies, especially MAS, SNDGO, NEA and HDB are working together to find ways to improve the day-to-day electronic payments experience in the heartlands, taking care to ensure that solutions should consider the needs of all, from the young to the old. The agencies are also crowdsourcing ideas from the private sector, so as to co-create solutions that will make electronic payments ubiquitous at hawker centres, HDB coffee shops, and heartland shops.

To be clear, while we promote electronic transactions, the Government is not targeting to phase out cash entirely. There will always be a group of Singaporeans who face practical challenges in accessing digital banking services and cash will remain important to them.

MAS will continue to monitor and work with the industry to ensure that basic cash services remain accessible to those who need them.

In this connection, Mr Patrick Tay asked if we should require all ATMs of banks to be inter-operable so as to make cash withdrawal points more accessible to residents.

We are actually approaching this from a position of advantage. Singapore is already well-served by ATMs. Our ATM coverage is significantly higher than in other city-states such as Hong Kong. The two biggest networks in Singapore are operated by DBS/POSB and UOB/OCBC. At least 90% of HDB households can find ATMs from both networks, ie an ATM from their own bank, within 500 meters of their homes. Many working adults and students will also have access to ATMs near their places of work or study or along their daily commutes.

The interoperability between the two local bank ATM networks is a further step that MAS has raised with the banks. It should yield efficiency gains in the system as a whole and allow for a redistribution of ATMs in the long term to maximize convenience to customers. However, to achieve efficiency gains, the number of ATMs may need to be scaled back in some locations, which could affect queuing times in those places.

Beyond ATMs, banks have also sought to improve Singaporeans' access to cash withdrawal services in other ways. They have partnered with major retail outlets such as 7-Eleven, Sheng Siong and Giant to offer fast and easy cash withdrawals as part of consumers' shopping experience.

Most fundamentally however, as I have mentioned earlier, we are working with the industry to develop widely accepted electronic payment options that are easy to use, even for the elderly. With more cashless alternatives, our reliance on cash for transactions, and the need for ubiquitous ATMs, should decline over time.

Singapore, as a compact city, needs to navigate this transition well and become a city ready for the future, and a bright spark in the digital world. At the same time, we will ensure that the transition is inclusive and no one will be left behind as we journey towards being a Smart Nation.

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## **WORK PERMITS FOR MALE FOREIGN DOMESTIC HELPERS TO CARE FOR MALE ELDERLY DISABLED PERSONS**

75 Ms **Denise Phua Lay Peng** asked the Minister for Manpower under what conditions are male foreign domestic helpers granted work permits to care for male elderly disabled persons at their residences.

**Mr Lim Swee Say:** MOM assesses applications to bring in male foreign domestic workers (FDWs) on a case by case basis and exercises flexibility in exceptional situations. We would assess if the family has special caregiving needs and why a male FDW may be more suitable than a female FDW. For example, a male FDW may be better at handling and caring for a male elderly disabled person who is of heavy build and who may behave aggressively. We would also consider the prospective FDW's nursing skillsets or experience in caregiving. In addition, he would have to meet the general eligibility criteria for FDWs.

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## **REDUCING ANXIETY LEVELS OF SINGAPORE STUDENTS**

76 **Dr Lim Wee Kiak** asked the Minister for Education (Schools) in light of a recent study by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development which reveals that Singapore students suffer from high levels of anxiety (a) what is the Ministry doing to help reduce this anxiety; and (b) how many students have been identified and counselled for anxiety attacks in the last two years.

**Mr Ng Chee Meng:** We adopt a holistic approach to education. Students are given a wider range of programmes that cater to their interests and build strong foundations for their lives. This is done through the Applied Learning Programmes and Learning for Life Programmes offered by schools, as well as the many opportunities and platforms for authentic student experiences in outdoor education and Co-Curricular Activities.

We discourage excessive competition among students and help them find purpose in their learning instead of just focusing solely on results and achievement. We have stopped naming the top scorers for national examinations. From the 2021 PSLE, students will be graded in broad bands and their achievement will not be dependent on the performance of the rest of the cohort.

Schools have a range of programmes to equip students with social and emotional competencies, stress-coping skills and realistic target-setting to better manage their emotions, stress and expectations.

We have been carefully monitoring the level of stress and anxiety among our students. The majority of students can manage their stress and anxiety. In 2016, around five out of every 1,000 students were given counselling support in school to manage anxiety arising from academic

stress. We will continue to monitor and take proactive steps to ensure our students' wellbeing.

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## **CORRELATION BETWEEN SUICIDE AND STUDENTS' ANXIETY LEVELS**

77 **Mr Low Thia Kiang** asked the Minister for Education (Schools) how do the levels of suicides and incidences of psychiatric conditions related to anxiety among students in Singapore compare with similar data of other developed countries.

**Mr Ng Chee Meng:** In 2016, around five out of every 1,000 students were given counselling support in school to manage anxiety arising from academic stress. MOE does not have the data to compare psychiatric conditions.

There were 22 cases of suicide among those aged 19 and below in 2016, 27 cases in 2015, 13 cases in 2014 and 17 cases in 2013. These numbers include students in our schools and post-secondary institutions as well as those who are not in our education system.

In general our youth suicide rate is lower than other developed countries.

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## **REQUESTS TO HDB FOR GOODWILL REPAIRS**

78 **Mr Lim Biow Chuan** asked the Minister for National Development how many requests for goodwill repairs were received by HDB in 2016 and whether HDB is adequately resourced to attend to such requests expeditiously.

**Mr Lawrence Wong:** Flat owners are responsible for the maintenance of the interior of their flats. This includes repair to ceiling leaks and spalling concrete that could occur due to wear and tear over time.

Nevertheless, HDB provides assistance through the Goodwill Repair Assistance (GRA) Scheme. The main objective of the GRA scheme is to assist flat owners, particularly for ceiling leak cases, where some upper- and lower-floor flat owners face difficulty in reaching an agreement to get a contractor to carry out the repairs.

In 2016, HDB assisted about 12,000 households under the GRA scheme. HDB has appointed several contractors to manage the volume of GRA cases received. Residents can be assured that HDB has sufficient resources to carry out repairs under the GRA scheme.

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## **GAMING ARCADE OPERATORS OBLIGATED TO IDENTIFY PATRONS WHO APPEAR ADDICTED**

79 **Mr Murali Pillai** asked the Minister for Home Affairs whether the Ministry will consider the imposition of obligations, either via licensing conditions or regulations, on gaming arcade operators to identify patrons believed to be suffering from gaming addiction and implement appropriate steps with a view to helping them cope with their addiction.

**Mr K Shanmugam:** Gaming arcades are regulated as amusement centres by the Police under the Public Entertainments Act. The Act regulates public entertainment to ensure that it is carried out in a lawful and orderly manner, in line with standards of public decency, and at suitable locations. This includes requiring operators of amusement centres to ensure that their establishments are not used for crimes.

Gaming does not pose the same level of law and order concerns as gambling, and amusement centres are therefore not required to identify patrons who may suffer from gaming addiction. That said, amusement centres are not allowed to admit students in school uniform, nor persons below the age of 16 before 6.30pm on a school day. This provides a certain level of safeguard for our young.

Beyond this, the Media Literacy Council (MLC) has been raising awareness of gaming addiction. It has resources on its website for parents and individuals to identify and manage online addictions among children and youths, including excessive computer gaming. The MLC also reaches out to the online community via social media to raise awareness of the issue.

Family and friends should also look out for signs of a loved one with a gaming addiction. They can encourage their loved ones to seek help at social service centres such as Touch Community Services and Fei Yue Community Services, which offer counselling and support services. Those with more serious addictions can be referred to the National Addictions Management Service, which offers treatment programmes and services.

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## **MEASURES TO PROTECT WOMEN IN CROWDED PLACES**

80 **Mr Desmond Choo** asked the Minister for Home Affairs in view of the rising cases of

outrage of modesty (a) how is the Ministry working with entertainment outlet operators to better protect female patrons; (b) how is the Ministry enhancing its measures in other crowded public places such as the public transport areas; and (c) whether there is a need to enhance the current legislation to curb such crimes.

**Mr K Shanmugam:** Public entertainment outlets are licensed by the Police under the Public Entertainments Act. As part of licensing conditions, operators must take steps to prevent crime on their premises, including outrage of modesty. They must, for example, ensure sufficient lighting and prevent overcrowding. The Police have also been working with nightclubs on additional measures such as the installation of CCTVs. These help to discourage commission of outrage of modesty.

In public transport areas, officers from the Public Transport Security Command conduct patrols to project Police presence. The Police have also been active in their crime prevention outreach efforts to commuters, through posters, videos and crime prevention roadshows in areas such as trains, train stations and bus interchanges. Such efforts heighten commuters' awareness of and vigilance against crime, including outrage of modesty.

Currently, the punishment for outrage of modesty can include a fine, caning, and imprisonment up to two years. If committed against persons under 14 years of age, the term of imprisonment can be up to five years.

We are watching the situation closely and will continue to take a tough stance against outrage of modesty. We will enhance the legislation if necessary. We urge the public to be vigilant and to report incidents to the authorities as soon as possible.

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## **PROPOSAL TO BAN VEHICLES FROM TURNING RIGHT SIMULTANEOUSLY AS PEDESTRIANS CROSS ROAD JUNCTIONS**

81 **Ms Joan Pereira** asked the Minister for Transport whether the Ministry will consider (i) banning vehicles turning right simultaneously as pedestrians cross the roads at junctions and (ii) programming junction signals such that vehicles will only be signalled to turn after the red-man signal has turned on.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** When the green-man signal is on, turning vehicles must always

give way to pedestrians crossing the road. To disallow vehicles from turning when the green-man signal is on but there are no pedestrians crossing may hamper traffic flow unnecessarily.

Nevertheless, to further enhance pedestrians' safety, LTA has adjusted traffic light timings to give pedestrians a head start in crossing the road, and installed lighted road studs and additional road markings and signs at higher risk junctions to remind motorists to give way.

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### **SAFETY SENSORS FOR BUSES**

82 **Ms Joan Pereira** asked the Minister for Transport what measures will be implemented to improve the safety of buses and whether the Ministry will consider requiring all buses to be equipped with features such as motion cameras, speed and obstacle sensor alarms and telematics systems to alert drivers to the risk of accidents and deter dangerous driving.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** Today, all public buses are already equipped with cameras and speed limiters. The newer buses have enhanced safety features. Around 40% of the fleet has telematics and around 15% has anti-collision warning systems. Over time, these will be standard features in all public buses. LTA is also exploring more advanced safety features, such as blind spot warning systems.

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### **PRIORITISE INSTALLATION OF SOLAR PANELS IN MATURE HDB ESTATES WITH MORE SENIOR CITIZENS**

83 **Mr Gan Thiam Poh** asked the Minister for National Development whether HDB can prioritise the installation of solar panels in mature HDB estates with a higher population of senior citizens so as to provide additional lighting along common corridors at the doorsteps of these elderly residents at a lower cost to the town councils.

**Mr Lawrence Wong:** HDB piloted the installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels on the rooftops of HDB blocks in 2009. Since then, such panels have been installed on about 1,000 blocks, with another 1,500 in progress. Solar PV installation is now carried out under the SolarNova programme, which was introduced in 2015 to accelerate the deployment of solar PV in Singapore.

Town Councils with blocks feasible for solar PV installation are being progressively scheduled to participate in SolarNova tenders. The feasibility of solar panel installation is determined by factors such as the location of each block and its corresponding solar irradiance potential, as well as the availability of roof space. The pace of SolarNova tenders, as well as the grouping of blocks, is based on the solar PV industry's installation capacity and logistical considerations – installations are generally grouped geographically to reduce overall implementation cost.

Besides the supply of energy using solar PV, energy savings can be achieved through managing the energy demand, for example through the use of energy efficient lighting while ensuring adequate lighting levels. For instance, HDB has been working with TCs to carry out the replacement of existing light fittings to LED, to reduce the energy consumption for common area lighting.

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## **IMPACT OF BUS CONTRACTING MODEL ON SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE METRICS OF PUBLIC BUSES**

86 **Mr Ong Teng Koon** asked the Minister for Transport whether the introduction of the new bus contracting model has led to improvements in service delivery and performance metrics on Singapore's bus network.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** As part of the transition to the bus contracting model, we had further raised service standards. The maximum headway during peak hours is reduced from 20 minutes to 15 minutes, with feeder bus services reduced by up to two minutes to between six to eight minutes. In addition, operators are incentivised and penalised on the regularity or timeliness of bus arrivals for all the services. This has resulted in a 25% reduction in average additional waiting time for 290 bus services. Commuters have benefitted from more frequent and timelier bus arrivals, and less crowded buses.

We have also seen the four bus companies enhancing their working conditions, human resource practices and employment terms to compete for bus captains. In fact, about 600 more Singaporeans have been attracted to the industry since the first package was implemented. A happier work force will ultimately lead to better service delivery.



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## **REVIEW OF AIRLINE INDUSTRY TO ASSESS NEED FOR STRUCTURAL CHANGES**

87 **Dr Lim Wee Kiak** asked the Minister for Transport (a) whether the Government will set up a committee to examine whether there should be structural changes in our airline industry; and (b) how many airline employees have lost their jobs between 2016 and 2017.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** Our airline industry is growing steadily. Since 2015, the airline workforce has grown by more than 5% to nearly 17,000 workers today. Company staff attrition rates have not been unusual. In 2016 and the first six months of 2017, for example, while Singapore-based airlines saw about 2,600 employees leaving their employment, a larger number, about 3,400, joined the airlines.

The airline industry is of course, not immune to disruptions brought about by technology, foreign competition and innovative business models. The Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore and the Changi Airport Group, for example, work closely with the airlines to develop new routes and increase traffic to and from Singapore. Importantly, airlines have to regularly evaluate their value proposition in order to stay relevant and competitive. Management and unions are alive to the competition and understand the need for continuous restructuring and embracing automation to raise productivity and meet rising consumer demand. There are several platforms for the Government and the airlines to discuss these changes and jointly formulate our response strategies, such as our industry engagement session by the Connectivity Subcommittee in 2016 to inform the works of the Committee on the Future Economy (CFE). In line with the CFE recommendations, we have launched the Air Transport Industry Transformation Map in April this year, to grow value-add per worker, improve the quality of jobs, and raise productivity. This will further support our airlines' efforts to stay ahead of the competition.

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## **LACK OF FIRE-RATED ENTRANCE DOOR AT SOME HDB FLATS**

89 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for National Development (a) whether the lack of a fire-rated entrance door affects the design of a HDB flat as a fire compartment; and (b) whether there are additional fire safety measures in place for HDB blocks where the majority

of flats do not have fire-rated entrance doors.

**Mr Lawrence Wong:** HDB blocks comply with the prevailing fire safety standards when they are built. Fire-rated entrance doors are provided where required under the Fire Code, such as for units where the entrance doors are within three meters of the lift lobby or staircase. This is to ensure that the lift lobbies and staircases are well protected so that all residents in the block can evacuate safely in the event of a fire. There are some unit types that do not require fire-rated doors under the Fire Code, such as those opening into external corridors. This notwithstanding, every residential unit is designed as a fire compartment, with concrete walls and floors that help to prevent the spread of fire beyond or into the unit.

Apart from designing all flats as fire compartments, HDB blocks incorporate other fire safety features. Staircases and lift lobbies of HDB blocks have good cross-ventilation for quick smoke dispersal. There are also exit staircases at a reasonable distance from each unit entrance to provide a safe means of escape from the building in the event of a fire. To facilitate fire-fighting, fire extinguishers, fire hose reels, dry or wet rising mains, fire engine access roads/access ways, fire-fighting lobbies and firemen lifts are also provided to HDB blocks where required by the Fire Code.

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## **PRE-REGISTRATION INDICATION OF INTEREST IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

91 **Mr Gan Thiam Poh** asked the Minister for Education (Schools) whether the Ministry will consider collating indications of interest in preferred primary schools from parents for their children a couple of years before Primary 1 registration to better plan for future intakes of each primary school and allocation of resources to the school.

**Mr Ng Chee Meng:** In planning the enrolment of schools, the Ministry of Education regularly reviews the demand and supply trends at the national and regional level, to ensure that there are sufficient vacancies for all eligible Primary One students. Our school planning takes into account the current and projected population and planned housing development programmes.

It would not be meaningful to collate indications of interest from parents before the Primary One Registration Exercise. This is because parents' choices can change over time, and

we should allow for this to happen. It would also not be tenable for intakes of schools to be planned based on parents' choices, as schools should be appropriately sized to enable them to mount a range of activities for the benefit of all students, and to be run efficiently.

What is most important to MOE is that every student receives a good quality, holistic education. Therefore, we have been resourcing all our schools with well-trained teachers, high-quality education facilities and rigorous school programmes and will continue to do so.

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## **PARKING OF SHARED BICYCLES SHOULD NOT OBSTRUCT PUBLIC SPACES**

92 **Mr Edwin Tong Chun Fai** asked the Minister for Transport whether the Ministry will require bicycle sharing operators to have a viable proposal for their customers to park rented bicycles adequately and without obstructing public spaces before they can be allowed to operate their business.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** Bicycle sharing operators (BSOs) are responsible for ensuring that their bicycles are not indiscriminately parked. If a shared bicycle is reported to be outside of a public bicycle parking lot, they have to remove it within half a day or face a penalty of \$300 for the first offence and \$500 per bicycle for subsequent offences. On top of this, LTA will impound the bicycle and levy a fee on the BSO for each bicycle impounded.

In addition, LTA, NParks and Town Councils are working with BSOs on a Memorandum of Understanding to lay out guidelines on the responsible operation of bicycle-sharing services in public spaces.

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## **TAKE-UP RATE FOR SAFE RIDING PROGRAMME**

93 **Mr Png Eng Huat** asked the Minister for Transport (a) what has been the take-up rate for the Safe Riding Programme (SRP) since its launch; and (b) what other measures, publicity, and education programmes that the Ministry is planning for to ensure safe riding on roads and footpaths in a proposed "car-lite" city.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** The Safe Riding Programme (SRP), which was originally

scheduled for launch in July, has been delayed till the end of this year. More time was required to refine the tender requirements after consultation with various stakeholders.

In the meantime, we are fostering a culture of safe and responsible riding in three ways. First, LTA is raising awareness and adoption of the new active mobility rules through a nationwide communications campaign and engagements with stakeholders such as PMD retailers and interest groups.

Second, the Government has stepped up enforcement against unsafe riding. Since January this year, LTA has issued more than 1,400 advisories for unsafe riding. LTA also plans to pilot the deployment of CCTV cameras at hotspots to deter errant behaviour.

Third, we have garnered more than 800 volunteers under the Active Mobility Patrol Scheme, to conduct regular patrols in their communities and to share safe riding practices with residents.

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## **PROPOSAL TO BAN DEBARKING OF DOGS**

94 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for National Development whether the Ministry will consider banning the practice of debarking dogs.

**Mr Lawrence Wong:** AVA does not encourage the practice of debarking. It should be performed only as an absolute last resort. The Code of Ethics for Veterinarians, which was co-developed by AVA and the Singapore Veterinary Association, requires veterinarians to advise their clients of non-surgical alternatives and to ensure that all reasonable efforts have been made to manage the barking problem prior to performing the surgery. Failure to do so can result in written warnings, composition fines, or even suspension or revocation of veterinary licences.

That said, there are some dog owners who are unable to resolve the barking problem despite having tried all other measures. For example, their dogs may be suffering from Canine Cognitive Dysfunction whose symptoms include compulsive behaviours like prolonged barking for no apparent reason. In such cases, debarking could well be the only option left to allow owners to keep their dogs, instead of having to give them up. That would be a worse outcome for both the animal and the responsible owner.

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## TACKLING FOOD FRAUD IN GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN

95 **Mr Chong Kee Hiong** asked the Minister for National Development (a) what measures does the Ministry have to counter the increasingly challenging problem of food fraud in the global supply chains; and (b) whether the Ministry can provide an update on the equipment, facilities and manpower investments and training to detect food fraud.

**Mr Lawrence Wong:** The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) has a comprehensive regulatory regime to ensure that the food we eat in Singapore is safe. This includes measures to protect our food supply from fraudulent practices such as substitution, adulteration, counterfeiting, and misrepresentation.

First, AVA ensures that food in Singapore comes from approved sources. All imported food products must comply with AVA's food safety legislation and requirements. These requirements also apply to food produced in Singapore.

Second, before food products enter the market, AVA regularly tests samples to ensure that the food is safe and authentic. This includes species identification and adulteration tests. Food products that fail these tests will not be allowed for sale.

As a pre-emptive measure, AVA scans for food-related news internationally to anticipate possible food-related fraud. AVA also investigates all allegations of food fraud in Singapore. Affected products will be removed from sale, and AVA will take enforcement action against any entity that intentionally adulterates food or misleads customers. Offenders may be fined up to \$10,000 and/ or imprisoned for up to three months. In addition, the implicated product will be destroyed and the licence may be suspended depending on the investigation.

Significant resources are allocated to keeping our food supply safe, with more than 270 officers involved in this work. In terms of training, officers regularly attend conferences and workshops to keep abreast of developments in food technologies and testing methodologies. AVA's laboratories are also fitted with advanced equipment. For example, AVA uses the Isotope Ratio Mass Spectrometer to detect whether honey has been adulterated by sugar. It also uses a DNA Thermocycler to differentiate meat types.

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**EXTENSION OF SCHOOL-CLEANING CONTRACT SIGNED IN 2014**

96 **Mr Zainal Sapari** asked Minister for Education (Schools) (a) whether the Ministry has extended its school-cleaning contract that was signed in 2014; and (b) what is the rationale and intent of extending the contract.

**Mr Ng Chee Meng:** MOE has awarded the new cleaning contracts for schools which will commence on 1 October 2017. The existing contracts were earlier extended for a few months as more time was required to evaluate the tenders received.

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Office of the Clerk of Parliament  
Singapore, 11 September 2017