

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**  
**SINGAPORE**  
**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
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**Written Answers to Questions for Oral Answer Not Answered by End of Question Time**

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## CONSUMERS PURSUING COMPLAINTS AGAINST MERCHANT

16 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for Trade and Industry (Industry) (a) for a complainant who wishes to pursue a complaint against a merchant, what kind of assistance from any consumer protection organisation is available and at what cost; and (b) has any complainant been refused assistance by such organisation and, if so, what is the breakdown of these reasons for the past five years.

**Mr S Iswaran:** The Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE) is the first point of contact for consumers who have disputes with retailers. CASE advises consumers on their rights and the possible courses of action that they may choose to take. The consumer can pursue the issue on his own or enlist CASE's assistance. Consumers who want CASE to assist them can choose from a range of measures such as negotiation and mediation. CASE has a set of fees for its services, which is tiered depending on the extent of services provided and the value of the claims. The list of fees is published online on CASE's website.

Over the past five years, CASE has helped to clarify an average of about 15,500 consumer enquiries per year. In addition, CASE has assisted or counselled an average of about 8,600<sup>1</sup> consumer cases per year. Of these cases, about 20% obtain letters from CASE which set out the consumer's rights, the case-specific concerns and resolution sought. The consumers use the letters to engage the retailers. Consumers pay CASE an administrative fee<sup>2</sup> of \$10.70 for this letter.

# National Archives of Singapore

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<sup>1</sup>This figure refers to consumers who were counselled by CASE and consumers who have taken up assisted or filed cases with CASE. Counsellled cases are those which the consumer chooses not to get CASE's help. Assisted cases are those which CASE gives the consumer a letter on CASE letterhead which the consumer then uses to pursue the case with the retailer himself. Filed cases are those which CASE will engage the retailer on the consumer's behalf. The average total number of complaints that CASE receives is about 25,000 p.a. This comprises cases that are assisted, filed, counselled, and others (i.e. cases seeking clarifications and do not require further follow up). Assisted and filed cases may result in mediation facilitated by CASE.

<sup>2</sup>All fees mentioned in the reply are inclusive of GST.

Consumers may also choose to have CASE negotiate with the retailer on their behalf<sup>3</sup>. As CASE is constituted as an association, it is only able to represent its members when dealing with the retailer. Consumers who become individual CASE members pay an annual membership fee of \$26.75<sup>4</sup>. Depending on the value of the claim, the consumer also pays an administrative fee which is tiered based on the value of the claim - ranging from \$10.70 for claims of less than \$5,000 to \$53.50 for claims of up to \$20,000; with an additional \$53.50 for every \$10,000 or part thereof above \$20,000.

CASE has not rejected any requests from consumers for assistance, except where the requests are beyond the ambit of consumer protection laws<sup>5</sup>. These include business-to-business disputes, application for accident claims and investment contracts.

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## ISSUANCE OF NEWSPAPER STREET VENDOR LICENCE

17 **Er Dr Lee Bee Wah** asked Minister for the Environment and Water Resources (a) how many newspaper street vendors have been issued with licences in the past three years; (b) how does one qualify for the licence; and (c) whether there is a quota on the number of licences issued for any one location.

**Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M:** Street hawking was rife in the early days of Singapore's development. The proliferation of street hawkers, however, posed a risk to public health as the street hawkers lacked proper equipment and amenities such as clean tap water. The lack of a proper waste management system also resulted in waste being thrown indiscriminately which in turn led to environmental pollution and the proliferation of vectors.

To address these problems, most of the street hawkers were relocated into purpose-built hawker centres which were provided with essential amenities such as piped water supply, proper sewage connections and bulk bin centres for the disposal of waste. Some hawkers were, however, allowed to continue operating in the streets as their trades were not compatible with

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<sup>3</sup>CASE considers these as filed cases.

<sup>4</sup>Within the year, the consumer who returns to CASE for a separate complaint would only need to pay the administrative fee when taking up the filed scheme. The fees (both membership and admin fee) are waived for consumers who are NTUC and members of one of the 28 Unions that are CASE institutional members (E.g. Singapore Teachers' Union and Public Utilities Board Employees' Union).

<sup>5</sup>An average of less than 2% p.a. From 2011 to Sep 2016, on average, 425 out of 25,000 feedback received were rejected p.a.

those in hawker centres but their activities were strictly enforced to ensure that their stall sites and their surroundings were kept clean at all times.

In 1994, street hawkers were licensed in a one-time exercise to control their numbers and no more licences were issued after that. The intention was to phase out these street hawkers through natural attrition and allow such trades to move into proper premises. However, in the early 2000s, the street hawking scheme was reopened as a means to temporarily help those who are needy and less employable tide over their financial difficulties. Today, licensed street hawkers sell items such as newspapers, ice-cream, canned drinks, costume jewellery and phone cards. Out of the 179 licensed street hawkers who sell newspapers, five of them were issued their licences in the last 3 years.

There are several criteria that applicants must comply with to obtain a street hawking licence. For example, applicants must be at least 45 years of age and be physically fit to conduct their business. Notwithstanding this, NEA will look at each application on a case-by-case basis. While there is no quota on the number of licences for any one location, licences can only be granted with the support of the relevant land agency or Town Council, which designates locations for street hawking activities so as to minimise disamenities to residents and unfair competition to businesses and other stakeholders in the vicinity.

Ultimately, street hawking is not a permanent solution for anyone trying to make a living. Those experiencing financial hardship can be better assisted through the various help and job placement schemes available. There are also various Government-funded training programmes for those who wish to pick up new skills and seek more stable forms of employment.

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## COMPLAINTS OF MISCONDUCT AGAINST LTA ENFORCEMENT

### OFFICERS

19 **Er Dr Lee Bee Wah** asked the Minister for Transport (a) since the deployment of LTA enforcement officers, how many complaints have been received and what action have been taken against these officers for misconduct; (b) what is the procedure to lodge a complaint against these officers; (c) what is the training given to these officers; and (d) whether the Ministry considers the temperament of the candidates before appointing them as enforcement officers.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** LTA has received 499 complaints against its enforcement officers

this year, of which 74 were found to be valid. These 74 complaints were against outsourced enforcement officers. LTA investigates these complaints and takes appropriate action against officers found guilty of misconduct, which can range from counselling to dismissal.

Members of the public who wish to lodge a complaint against LTA's enforcement officers can do so via email, text message or an online feedback form. The information can be found on LTA's website.

LTA's enforcement officers are indeed assessed for suitability for the job, including temperament. They undergo training that includes code of conduct, rules of engagement, and how to handle members of the public.

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## INVESTIGATIONS INTO 'PENNY STOCK' CASES

21 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Prime Minister in light of the securities fraud investigations relating to the "penny stock" case which have been ongoing for several years (a) how robust are Singapore's safeguards against such cases of fraud; and (b) how does the Commercial Affairs Department compare to equivalent bodies in other developed countries in terms of the level of staffing and resources devoted to detecting and investigating securities fraud.

**Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam (for the Prime Minister):** Singapore has robust safeguards against attempts to manipulate or rig our capital markets. There are strict rules in place and our regulatory regime against market misconduct is comparable to those in other developed markets. But it is not possible to have safeguards that can prevent all misconduct, which is why we have an effective enforcement regime to ensure that any market misconduct is swiftly detected, thoroughly investigated, and firmly dealt with. In the most recent Financial Sector Assessment Report on Singapore, the International Monetary Fund rated our regime very favourably.

The Singapore Exchange (SGX), MAS and CAD work closely together in investigating suspected fraud in our capital markets and taking enforcement actions. SGX is the frontline supervisor. It monitors trading activities and conducts preliminary assessments of possible market misconduct, using electronic surveillance systems. SGX recently enhanced its "Trade With Caution" alerts by providing investors more detailed information on unusual trading activities. Such alerts serve to disrupt at an early stage any efforts at market manipulation by

those who may be responsible for the unusual trading activities.

Besides referrals from SGX, MAS and CAD also receive market intelligence on suspected misconduct from interactions with financial institutions and market participants, suspicious transaction reports lodged with CAD, and public feedback.

MAS and CAD conduct joint investigations on securities market misconduct such as insider trading and market manipulation. This close inter-agency cooperation leverages MAS' expertise in financial markets and CAD's experience in investigating financial crime. MAS and CAD are continually enhancing their enforcement capabilities to detect and investigate market abuse and misconduct, including the use of data analytics and digital forensics.

MAS and CAD have also taken tough enforcement actions to deter securities fraud. Between 2011 and 2015, MAS took 21 civil penalty actions against market misconduct offences under the Securities and Futures Act. Over the same period, CAD prosecuted a total of 34 persons for false trading and other serious market misconduct.

Given the complexity of most instances of securities market fraud, investigations take time. The amount of evidence that needs to be gathered and analysed, such as bank accounts and transactions, is typically large. If suspects and witnesses are not available or uncooperative, it adds to the length of investigations. These are challenges that cannot be directly addressed by merely increasing resources.

The resources that Singapore has devoted to investigating market misconduct offences are commensurate with the market capitalisation and number of listed companies in our securities market, and comparable with other developed markets such as Hong Kong and Australia. More important than the numbers is the quality and type of resources we have to detect and investigate capital market crimes. The approach taken by CAD and MAS is to focus on having dedicated units equipped with specialised skillsets that look into securities fraud-related crimes, and to continually deepen expertise and capabilities.

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## **TEACHERS WHO OFFER TUITION SERVICES OUTSIDE SCHOOL HOURS**

24 **Mr Seah Kian Peng** asked the Minister for Education (Schools) how many teachers in primary and secondary schools currently give tuition after their working hours.

**Mr Ng Chee Meng:** MOE currently does not track the number of teachers who give

tuition.

Teachers are allowed to provide private tuition outside school hours as long as it does not exceed six hours a week and does not adversely affect their work in school. They are not required to seek permission to do so.

MOE has an interest in ensuring that such activities do not adversely affect teachers' ability to discharge their duties. The Ministry is planning to collect information on such activities on a regular basis and is considering different options for doing so.

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### **CRITERIA FOR GRANTING FOREIGN ENTITY PERMIT TO ENGAGE IN ACTIVITIES RELATING TO SPEAKERS' CORNER EVENTS**

25 **Mr Seah Kian Peng** asked the Minister for Home Affairs what criteria will be used to determine whether a foreign entity gets a permit to engage in activities relating to a Speakers' Corner event.

**Mr K Shanmugam:** On 21 October 2016, the Ministry of Home Affairs announced changes to the Public Order (Unrestricted Area) Order 2016 to reinforce the principle that the Speakers' Corner was set up primarily for Singaporeans. These changes came into effect on 1 November 2016.

The changes include allowing Singapore entities to organise or assist to organise events at the Speakers' Corner without the need for a permit, subject to the conditions in the Order. This is an extension of the existing exemption for Singapore citizens to organise events without the need for a permit.

Non-Singapore entities were not previously exempted, and continue not to be exempted. As such, a permit will be required if a non-Singapore entity organises or assists to organise an event at the Speakers' Corner. This includes sponsoring, publicly promoting the event, or organising its members or employees to participate in the event.

Police will assess such applications on a case-by-case basis. Some factors that the Police will consider include:

- Whether the event poses law and order concerns; and
- Whether the event addresses issues pertaining to race and religion.

In addition to the above considerations, a permit will not be granted to foreigners,

including non-Singapore entities, if the event relates to political or controversial social issues.

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## **WELFARE OF ANIMALS BRED IN LOCAL PET FARMS**

27 **Dr Chia Shi-Lu** asked the Minister for National Development what checks and enforcement measurements are in place to ensure the welfare of animals being bred in our local pet farms and whether AVA has sufficient certified personnel to conduct these inspections.

**Mr Lawrence Wong:** There are legislative provisions to safeguard animal welfare under AVA's Animals and Birds Act (ABA). Under the Act, all owners owe a duty of care to the animals under their charge.

For pet farms, AVA imposes additional licensing conditions to safeguard the welfare of animals that are bred and sold. Licensees have to fulfil stringent requirements on healthcare and the living environment of their animals.

In August 2016, AVA issued a Code of Animal Welfare for the pet industry. It applies to all pet farms and shops, as well as pet businesses not licensed by AVA like pet groomers. This Code stipulates minimum requirements for kennel spaces, housekeeping, diet and feeding etc. Non-compliance can lead to enforcement action by AVA.

AVA has enough trained officers to conduct regular spot checks on pet farms. However, as animal welfare is a shared responsibility, we also encourage the public to be vigilant and to report errant pet farms to AVA. Enforcement aside, AVA will also continue to work with the pet industry to raise animal welfare standards through partnership and education.

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## **DISCONTINUATION OF HARDSHIP SCHEME FOR HAWKERS**

29 **Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap** asked the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources (a) what are the reasons for the discontinuation since 1989 of subsidised stalls under the Government's hardship scheme in markets/hawker centres managed by NEA; and (b) whether the Ministry will consider reinstating this scheme.

**Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M:** Under the old Hardship Scheme, vacant hawker stalls were offered to those experiencing financial hardship at subsidised rent. However, the take-up rate

was low as most hardship cases preferred to hold out for a vacant stall only in the more popular centres. Due to its limited effectiveness, this scheme was discontinued in 1990. Today, anyone can bid for vacant hawker stalls which NEA puts up for tender every month.

There are no plans to reinstate the scheme. To be successful and sustain a hawker stall, a hawker requires entrepreneurship and passion, no different from any business. It would, therefore, make more sense to let those who are genuinely interested in the hawker trade to bid for stalls, as they will have built in both the risks and the gains. It is not tenable to ring-fence a certain number of stalls for those in financial difficulty and believe they will automatically succeed. Those who face financial hardship can seek assistance through the various Government help schemes available.

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### **SCALING WATER CONSERVATION TAX TO ALLOW FOR MINIMUM HYGIENE STANDARDS**

30 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources whether the Ministry will consider scaling the application of the water conservation tax (WCT) for households such that there is no WCT imposed on a quantity of household water consumption deemed necessary for minimum hygiene standards.

**Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M:** The total water price comprises the water tariff, used water charges and the Water Conservation Tax (WCT). Currently, both the water tariff and the WCT are tiered. While households that consume less than 40m<sup>3</sup> of water pay a water tariff of \$1.17/m<sup>3</sup>, and a WCT at 30% of the water tariff, households that consume more than 40m<sup>3</sup> of water per month pay a higher tariff and a higher WCT, at 45% of tariff. The differentiated tariff and WCT serve to discourage excessive water consumption. Mr Perera's suggestion would mean further differentiating WCT such that consumption within a certain volume below the first consumption tier will not attract the WCT.

We have imposed WCT on overall water consumed because of the principle that water conservation should apply to all households from the first drop. Whether water is used for basic or discretionary purposes, there is a need to ensure prudence and avoid wastage. Hence, the WCT is levied as a percentage of water tariff to reinforce the message that water is precious from the very first drop.

This is consistent with our water pricing principle and approach, which is to price water to reflect its Long Run Marginal Cost (LRMC). The WCT, together with the water tariff and used water charges, seek to price water such that it reflects the cost of producing the next drop of potable water, which is likely to be more from desalination and NEWater. This ensures that water demand, for whatever purposes, takes into account the scarcity value of water.

Nonetheless, we appreciate Mr Perera's intent in ensuring that water remains affordable for household needs. For this, the Government provides appropriate cash grants to all HDB households through the Utilities-Save (U-Save) scheme to help defray their utilities expenses.

This approach allows Government to right-price water to encourage prudent use of water, while at the same time ensure affordability of utilities to lower income households.

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### **TRAINING AND HELP FOR TEACHERS TO COPE WITH STRESS**

35 **Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap** asked the Minister for Education (Schools) (a) what services or mechanisms are available to teachers to resolve disputes between parents and teachers; (b) how does the Ministry address work-related stress faced by teachers; and (c) what services are available to teachers that cater to their psychological well-being.

**Mr Ng Chee Meng:** Our schools seek to establish positive and mutually respectful partnerships with parents. In doing so, they are supported with resources such as a Parent Engagement Guide and teachers are also given training in parent engagement skills. In cases where teachers need help in engaging parents, they can seek advice and guidance from their school leaders. When needed, school leaders will engage the parents directly.

With regard to work-related stress, measures have been put in place to support and guide schools in teacher work allocation. We also regularly review resources provided to schools, including manpower support, to ensure that schools are able to implement their programmes well while keeping the work assigned to teachers manageable. In addition, teachers are provided with protected vacation time to enable them to rest and recharge.

Our teachers are strongly encouraged to share and discuss their concerns about workload with their supervisors and school leaders. Should they need emotional and psychological support, there are dedicated professional counsellors within MOE who provide counselling support to individual teachers. These professional counsellors also conduct workshops for teachers in areas

such as managing difficult conversations and work with the teachers on stress management.

The well-being of our teachers is important and we will continue to support them in managing their work and workload.

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## **CONCRETE SLABS COVERING WATER TANKS AT ROOF-TOPS OF HDB FLATS**

36 **Mr Gan Thiam Poh** asked the Minister for National Development whether HDB can explore building concrete slabs over water tanks and pipes at the roof top of old HDB flats or other effective methods to cover the tanks and pipes to prevent them from being exposed under strong sunlight as a result of which water flowing out from the taps in the flats will not be overly hot for use.

**Mr Lawrence Wong:** In older HDB blocks, the water tanks are housed in the roof top water tank rooms, which are not exposed to direct sunlight. Hence, water tanks might not be the cause of the feedback on hot water flowing out of the taps of some flats during hot weather. The likely cause is exposure of the main water distribution pipes to the sun's heat, especially for pipes running over a long distance due to the block's configuration of a long span.

It is thus doubtful that the suggestion to build concrete slabs as shelter for the tanks and pipes will address the problem. In addition, the building structure and rooftop of HDB blocks may not be designed to take such additional load. There are other feasible ways to mitigate the extent of water pipes being heated up. Town Councils could install rigid PVC pipes as a cover over the water pipes to provide some insulation. For shorter water pipes, reflective paints could also be used to reflect solar radiation.

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## **HOUSING AND FLAT RENTAL ASSISTANCE FOR SINGLE UNWED MOMS**

38 **Ms Kuik Shiao-Yin** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development (a) how does the Ministry work with HDB to solve housing issues of single unwed mothers who are too well-off to qualify for a rental flat but too poor to buy a flat; (b) why does the Ministry believe that home ownership and not rental access is the better long-term solution to help families escape poverty; and (c) how does the Ministry help single mothers balance the financial trade-offs

between working for more income versus having their rental go up once their income goes up.

**Mr Tan Chuan-Jin:** Single unwed parents with housing difficulties can approach HDB for assistance and advice on their housing options. Where necessary, HDB would refer the parents to MSF and social service agencies for counselling and support. MSF works closely with HDB and social service agencies to help address their family and relationship issues and to provide financial and employment assistance. Each family will be assisted based on their individual circumstances, and the agencies will work with them to achieve housing stability.

We believe that homeownership is a better long-term solution for families than rental because it provides a greater sense of stability and gives families an asset, allowing them to share in Singapore's progress. Monthly instalments for sold flats can also be paid using CPF monies, unlike rental housing which must be paid in cash. This will save some cash for families and help them with their immediate cash positions.

HDB also recognises the needs of low-income households who cannot afford to own a flat immediately and have no family support, and provides public rental flats as temporary housing for them. Public rental tenants with higher incomes pay higher rent than those with lower incomes. This ensures that subsidies are progressive and targeted at those who need more help. However, HDB also exercises flexibility. For instance, for tenants whose monthly income has just improved from the lowest income tier to the next, HDB could waive their rent increase at tenancy renewal so that they can continue to pay the lower rent for another two years. After two years, if their income increase is still low relative to the rent increase, HDB will continue to waive the rent increase for another two years.

With these waivers, tenants effectively have up to four years to improve their incomes to be better off than before, even after taking into account any rental increases. We thus encourage tenants to focus on improving their incomes. This is a surer and better way to increase disposable incomes, and to eventually go beyond public rental to homeownership.

Families who face difficulties can continue to approach their nearest Social Service Office or Family Service Centre for assistance.

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## **IMPACT OF TRANSBOUNDARY HAZE POLLUTION ACT ON AIR QUALITY**

39 **Mr Ong Teng Koon** asked the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources (a)

to what extent the improvement in air quality this year can be attributed to the Transboundary Haze Pollution Act; and (b) how can it be ensured that the problem does not resurface in future years.

**Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M:** There have been more occurrences of rain in the region, in particular over Sumatra and Kalimantan, during the traditional dry season from June to October this year as compared to the same period in 2015<sup>6</sup>. The wetter weather has helped to alleviate the hotspots and smoke haze situation in the region. We also appreciate the Indonesians' efforts to prevent and mitigate the forest fires on the ground. Air quality in 2016 has therefore been better than that in 2015. In 2016, we have so far only recorded four "Unhealthy" days. In comparison, there were 40 "Unhealthy" days, five "Very Unhealthy" days and one "Hazardous" day in 2015.

Nevertheless, we need to be mindful that transboundary haze has been a persistent problem in our region, and we cannot prematurely conclude that it is behind us because of one good year. The international community has become increasingly aware that eradicating haze in our region is crucial to the global fight against climate change. The 2015 haze episode in our region was found to occur mostly on degraded peatlands, which are major carbon sinks. According to a recent scientific study<sup>7</sup> conducted by scientists from the Netherlands, Britain and Indonesia, the 2015 fires in Indonesia had generated 850 million tonnes of greenhouse gases. This is more than half of the 1.5 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide that was saved from the increased use of renewable energy by the whole world in 2015.

Fundamentally, the main cause of transboundary haze in our region remains commercially driven. This means that there must be continual efforts to get companies in the pulp and paper and the palm oil industries to adopt environmentally sustainable practices that do not contribute to smoke haze.

One key measure is the Transboundary Haze Pollution Act (THPA) which seeks to hold

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<sup>6</sup>The prolonged dry weather experienced in 2015 was exacerbated by the occurrence of a strong El Nino, which contributed to the escalation in hotspot activities and dense haze in the region.

<sup>7</sup>This data was obtained from a study by scientists from the Netherlands, Britain and Indonesia, published in the online journal Scientific Reports in June 2016. This is the first scientific report calculating greenhouse gas emissions from the fires using measurements on the ground combined with satellite observations. The report concluded that 884 million tonnes of carbon dioxide was emitted in the region in 2015, with 97% originating from fires in Indonesia. The results also showed that regional carbon dioxide emissions from the fires were 11.3 million tonnes per day in September and October 2015, more than the 28-nation EU's daily emissions of 8.9 million tonnes during the same period.

haze-causing companies accountable and deter entities from engaging in activities that would contribute to haze in Singapore. The National Environment Agency (NEA) has sent a number of Notices under the THPA and investigations are still on-going. We will take the necessary steps to enforce the THPA, while bearing in mind that we also have to operate within the ambit of international law. We will hold any Singapore-linked persons or entities to account. At the same time, even if the errant company's officers are foreigners, they will have to comply with the laws of the country, including the Notices under the THPA, should they come to Singapore. As the THPA has only been in force for a short time, we cannot draw any conclusions on its effectiveness, as this will only be apparent over the longer term.

Apart from regulatory deterrence, it is also important for consumers at various levels of the supply chain, in Singapore and our region, to send a strong signal against practices that contribute to the haze. Recently, NTUC FairPrice shared that their FairPrice house brand edible oils that contain palm oil are from sources certified by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). This is indeed commendable. In addition, ground-up initiatives by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) can also complement this. For example, the formation of the Singapore Alliance on Sustainable Palm Oil in June this year has helped to raise public awareness on the use of Certified Sustainable Palm Oil (CSPO).

This builds upon what has been happening globally. In April 2016, consumer groups including Nestle, Unilever, Mars and Kellogg suspended business with IOI Group after a decision by the RSPO to suspend certification for the company's palm oil. This suspension was due to IOI's failure to prevent its subsidiaries' involvement in deforestation in Indonesia in 2015. Even with the RSPO restoring IOI's certification in August 2016, consumer groups such as Unilever had indicated that they do not intend to resume business with IOI Group until they see tangible progress in IOI's declared remedial action plan.

Lastly, regional cooperation is also essential in our fight against transboundary haze. We continue to support initiatives that can help prevent future occurrences of the haze at regional fora, such as ASEAN. For example, Singapore hosts the ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre (ASMC), which provides daily hotspot information and other monitoring and assessment functions for the region. We also contribute to the capacity building efforts in the region through workshops under the Regional Haze Training Network for ASEAN Member States (AMS). In addition, Singapore has been actively participating in the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering

Committee (MSC) on Transboundary Haze Pollution to ensure that regional countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and Thailand undertake collective action to tackle the haze problem. We had also developed an ASEAN Sub-regional Haze Monitoring System (AHMS) to improve transparency and accountability on companies and to promote sustainable land clearing practices by the land owners, and have been working with MSC countries to operationalise the AHMS.

In August this year, the Roadmap on ASEAN Cooperation towards Transboundary Haze Pollution Control with Means of Implementation was formally adopted by AMS at the 12th Conference of Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution in Kuala Lumpur. It serves as a strategic framework to implement collaborative actions to achieve a vision of "Transboundary Haze-Free ASEAN by 2020".

We must press on with our efforts, not just during the haze season, but consistently throughout the year because haze is a serious environmental disaster with wide-ranging impact for us now, and into the future. Irresponsible burning over the years has affected the health of millions of people, impacted regional economies, and caused irreversible loss of biodiversity. We cannot rest on our past efforts and must continue to urge all relevant parties to work together towards realising a haze-free ASEAN by 2020 if not earlier.

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## **IMPACT ON CARPARK PROVISIONS WITH REDEVELOPMENT OF GOLDEN SHOE COMPLEX**

40 **Mr Ang Wei Neng** asked the Minister for Transport (a) what is the impact on carpark provisions in the CBD when Golden Shoe Carpark is developed into an office building; and (b) whether the Ministry is revising the carpark provision guidelines of shopping centres and office buildings inside and outside the CBD.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** There are adequate parking lots in the vicinity of Golden Shoe Car Park, even if it is redeveloped into an office building. There are also many public transport options, with two MRT stations on three different lines and 50 bus services serving the area.

LTA will revise its requirements for the provision of car parks from time to time, in tandem with the expansion of our public transport network and in line with our car-lite strategy.

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## NUMBER OF SMOKERS AND PATIENTS WITH SMOKING-RELATED DISEASES

42 **Dr Chia Shi-Lu** asked the Minister for Health (a) whether the number of patients with diseases caused by smoking has fallen in the last three years; (b) whether the number of smokers, especially those aged 30 years and below, has decreased; and (c) whether the Ministry will consider reducing hospital subsidies for active smokers as a deterrent measure.

**Mr Gan Kim Yong:** Based on the two most recent national health surveys conducted in 2010 and 2013, smoking prevalence among those aged 18 to 69 years declined slightly from 14.3% to 13.3%. Amongst those aged 30 years and below, smoking prevalence decreased more significantly from 16.8% to 13.4%.

The age-standardised hospitalisation rates of Singapore residents for smoking-related diseases fell slightly over the last three years, from 15.8 per 1,000 residents in 2013 to 15.4 per 1,000 residents in 2014 and 15.0 per 1,000 residents in 2015.

Reducing hospital subsidies for smokers as a deterrent measure could result in unintended consequences, for example patients may delay seeking treatment, which can increase the risk of complications and further affect their health.

We want to focus on helping smokers to quit smoking. The Ministry of Health has developed a comprehensive tobacco control plan with both legislative and non-legislative measures to encourage smokers to quit and discourage non-smokers, especially youth, from picking up smoking.

The Health Promotion Board has more than 200 smoking cessation touchpoints, including healthcare institutions and retail pharmacies in the community. Smokers who want to quit smoking can also seek help through the toll-free QuitLine and available online resources.

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