

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
SINGAPORE
OFFICIAL REPORT
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COMMENDATION OF WOMEN FOR SACRIFICES MADE IN SUPPORTING NATIONAL SERVICE

19 **Assoc Prof Daniel Goh Pei Siong** asked the Minister for Defence whether there are any plans in the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of National Service to honour women for the sacrifices they have made as mothers and wives of Singaporean men who have served national service.

Dr Ng Eng Hen: As we commemorate 50 years of National Service this year, we are giving the NS50 Recognition Package to the more than one million national servicemen who have served two or more years of National Service duties, as a token of appreciation for their primary role in ensuring Singapore's defence and security. National servicemen can enjoy the vouchers and free SAFRA and Home Team NS membership in the Package with their families.

The wider community - families, employers, volunteers, religious groups, businesses and other community organisations - also plays an important role. Their support enables our national servicemen to serve with pride and dedication. We recognise these contributions through ongoing initiatives such as the Total Defence Awards and annual tax reliefs for spouses and parents of national servicemen. This year, we will continue to do so through the various NS50 events and activities, such as the NS50 Week and NS50 Dinner Reception.

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DETECTION OF ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE AT BORDER CHECKPOINTS

21 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for National Development (a) for each year in the past three years, how many cases of illegal wildlife trade have been detected at our border checkpoints and within Singapore (past the border checkpoints) respectively; (b) from these cases, how many live animals have been confiscated annually at our border checkpoints and within Singapore (past the border checkpoints) respectively; and (c) how many of these animals currently remain under our care.

Mr Lawrence Wong: In the last three years, AVA detected 10 cases of illegal wildlife trade at our border checkpoints. During the same period, 58 cases were detected within Singapore. Arising from these cases, AVA confiscated 660 live animals. While the vast majority

were given to the Singapore Zoo or repatriated to the source country, 77 animals are still in AVA's custody pending further investigations and court trials.

AVA works closely with Singapore Customs and ICA on the detection of illegal wildlife trade cases. Information is also shared among our enforcement agencies to facilitate enforcement. While the authorities at all our border checkpoints remain vigilant, we also urge the public to do their part to refrain from such trade and to report any suspicious cases. By working together, we can help stop the illegal trade in wildlife.

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INDISCRIMINATE PASTING OF ADVERTISEMENTS AT PUBLIC PLACES

22 **Mr Darryl David** asked the Minister for National Development whether the Government can prohibit the indiscriminate pasting of bills, flyers, advertisements and other similar materials at public places in HDB estates such as lifts, lift landings, doors, gates, circuit-boxes and other areas, in line with that taken by agencies such as the LTA in respect of the sticking of materials on lamp posts, traffic-light posts, railings and other public areas under its jurisdiction.

Mr Lawrence Wong: The Town Councils Act empowers Town Councils to set by-laws to regulate the use of common property, and impose fines for any contravention. Hence, Town Councils can take action under their by-laws against any person found pasting flyers and advertisements without the Town Councils' authorisation.

If stickers are pasted on residents' doors or gates, the affected residents may seek help from their respective Town Councils. In practice, Town Councils would typically warn the advertisers against such actions. Town Councils may also remove the stickers or ask the advertisers to do so.

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INCOME GENERATED BY GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS FROM COMMUNITY TRADE FAIRS

23 **Mr Png Eng Huat** asked the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth for FY2015/16 what is (i) the amount of income earned by grassroots organisations (GROs) from community trade fairs (ii) the percentage of the earned income used by GROs for welfare

assistance, scholarships and bursaries and (iii) the amount of sponsorships in kinds and cash collected by the GROs for staging community events.

Mr Chan Chun Sing (for the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth):

Grassroots organisations (GROs) help PA achieve its mission of building cohesive communities. Amongst its many community building activities, GROs help organise various community service programmes, such as those that help seniors remain active in the community, and support needy families.

To help fund some of these activities, GROs raised about \$27 million in sponsorships and donations and \$7 million from community trade fairs in FY2015/2016.

In FY2015/2016, GROs also gave out \$10 million in direct financial help such as welfare assistance, scholarships and bursaries. This complements Government assistance programmes for residents who need a bit more help.

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STRENGTHENING BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH AUSTRALIA

24 **Mr Kwek Hian Chuan Henry** asked the Minister for Trade and Industry (Industry) (a) what are some of our recent commercial investments with Australia; and (b) whether the Government intends to strengthen engagements with key Australian state governments with the objective of promoting bilateral business, trade and investment.

Mr S Iswaran: Australia and Singapore enjoy strong bilateral trade and investment ties¹.

In 2015, Singapore's stock of direct investments into Australia was S\$34.9 billion, making Australia one of Singapore's top 10 overseas investment destinations. Singapore companies have invested into diverse sectors including telecommunications, tourism, utilities and real estate. Our companies are also keen to explore opportunities in sectors such as agri-business.

Australia continues to remain an attractive investment destination given its strong fundamentals. For example, last year, Surbana Jurong invested nearly S\$400 million in Australian-based SMEC Holdings to form a global consultancy group specialising in urban and infrastructure development across countries in Asia, Australia, the Middle East, Africa and the

¹In 2016, Australia was Singapore's 13th largest trading partner with bilateral trade of S\$17 billion. According to Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Singapore was Australia's 11th largest trading partner.

Americas. Ascendas Reit also acquired properties in Sydney and Melbourne last year for A\$168 million.

Likewise, Singapore continues to attract Australian companies. One of the world's largest integrated mining companies, BHP Billiton, has established its global headquarters in Singapore. Australia's largest telecommunications company, Telstra, has its regional headquarters in Singapore from which it also funds start-up initiatives.

We are continuing to strengthen bilateral ties with Australia at multiple levels. First, Singapore and Australia have elevated our bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. The Singapore-Australia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) was upgraded last year as part of the CSP negotiations. The upgraded SAFTA will help deepen commercial links and provide greater opportunities for bilateral exports and investments. We are working towards the ratification and implementation of the upgraded SAFTA this year.

Second, we are working with the Australian government to launch an Australian "landing pad" in Singapore to facilitate access to investment, mentorship and strategic partnership for Australian high-tech start-ups. Singapore will be the fifth and final international location for the Australian government-promoted innovation "landing pads". The initiative will create opportunities for Australian entrepreneurs and Singapore companies to collaborate and do business in Asia, using Singapore as a base.

Third, we have stepped up our engagement with Australia at the State level through IE Singapore and EDB. Our companies are regarded as credible partners to collaborate with the agri-business sector to grow the export of quality Australian products to Asia. For example, IE's work with the Queensland State to introduce their growers to Singapore-based traders and cold-chain logistics companies has yielded a partnership between Australia's Story Fresh and Singapore's Indoguna for the export of leafy vegetables to Asia, including Singapore and Hong Kong. IE Singapore has also been working with the South Australian government and private enterprises to explore collaborations with Singapore's food traders and logistics players.

Singapore has also hosted visits to Singapore by many Australian State delegations. All six Australian states have established trade offices in Singapore which has helped to further strengthen bilateral ties at the national and state levels.

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REPAIR OF LIFTS THAT BREAK DOWN REPEATEDLY

26 **Ms Tin Pei Ling** asked the Minister for National Development (a) what is the Ministry's plan to fix new lifts that continue to break down despite a re-commissioning exercise; and (b) whether the expected increase in maintenance and repair cost over a "lemon" lift's shelf life due to the frequent breakdowns is less than the replacement cost.

Mr Lawrence Wong: MND takes a serious view on the safety of lifts in Singapore. We have previously explained HDB's comprehensive approach - spanning lift procurement, installation and maintenance - to ensure that lifts in HDB estates are safe and fit for operation. There is a lift commissioning process in place, which includes an independent audit of key safety features and a stress test of 1,000 start-stop operations. These are over and above existing regulatory requirements.

The lifts in Ms Tin Pei Ling's ward which have been experiencing higher than usual breakdown and fault rates are part of a batch of 469 lifts recently installed by Sigma. HDB's investigations revealed that while the design and installation of the affected lifts complied with prevailing codes and standards, the doors and sensors are more susceptible to misalignment.

HDB has been working closely with Sigma to address this issue. Apart from the re-commissioning exercises which Ms Tin mentioned, Sigma has also been undertaking improvement works to make the doors less susceptible to misalignment. The works include modification, replacement and addition of some auxiliary components of the lift door to enhance door operations. As a result, we have seen an improvement in the performance of the Sigma lifts. To ensure that all issues are addressed, and the improvements in lift performance are sustained, a separate team of quality inspectors has been brought in by Sigma to conduct 100% checks on every one of the 469 lifts.

HDB is closely monitoring the work done by the company, and will continue to hold Sigma responsible for the corrective action necessary to ensure that the lifts meet the required performance standards on a sustained basis.

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AUTOMATION AND ROBOTICS IN HOSPITALS

28 **Miss Cheng Li Hui** asked the Minister for Health (a) how has the progress of automation in our hospitals been in the last three years; (b) how prevalent is the use of robotics;

and (c) what is the estimated increase in productivity.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: As Singapore's population ages, we are faced with tighter labour constraints and a rising demand for healthcare services. Healthcare providers have to focus on productivity and improve operational efficiency to continue delivering quality care to patients.

Productivity in healthcare is about increasing value to patients, for example by doing more with the same amount of resources. One initiative under our Productivity Drive is to use automation and robotics as a workforce multiplier to reduce the amount of manual work, and enable older employees to continue working for a longer period of time.

Since 2012, the Ministry of Health (MOH) has supported healthcare providers to invest in productivity improvements. We have funded more than 200 projects so far, including those involving automation and robotics. Examples include the use of pneumatic tube systems for sending documents and specimens, and the automation of laboratory analysis processes. Hospitals are also using Automated Guided Vehicles to transport inventory items and deliver meals, and deploying automated cleaning robots, remote patient monitoring devices to improve their productivity.

Another example is the Pharmacy Automation System, which allows medications to be picked more accurately and quickly. This has reduced pharmacy waiting times by up to 50% in KK Women's and Children's Hospital, National University Hospital and Tan Tock Seng Hospital. The Outpatient Pharmacy Automation System (OPAS) at KK Women's and Children's Hospital's Emergency Pharmacy was further developed to incorporate a new robotic bottle medication dispensing system that automatically loads, picks, and packs bottles. One year into implementation, OPAS has helped KKH to increase its pharmacy capacity by close to 30% with the same staff strength.

We are also exploring new ways to deliver healthcare such as through tele-health, where consultations can be performed via video to reduce physical clinic visits. Physiotherapists could prescribe rehabilitation exercises to patients at home and monitor their progress remotely using wearable sensors and analytics. To bring healthcare beyond hospitals into the community, we are scaling up our national tele-health platforms to more healthcare institutions and community care providers.

In addition, public healthcare institutions are reviewing their workflow and processes. This

includes re-designing of job roles and up-skilling of healthcare staff to provide better care for patients. MOH will continue to work closely with our healthcare institutions to support productivity initiatives that enhance patient care and service quality, and make our healthcare system more productive and sustainable.

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IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT'S ANTI-SMOKING CAMPAIGN ON YOUTH SMOKING

29 **Er Dr Lee Bee Wah** asked the Minister for Health (a) what has been the impact of the Government's anti-smoking campaign over the past three years; (b) how many smokers have given up smoking during this period; (c) how has the campaign prevented young people from taking up the habit; and (d) whether the Ministry has plans to increase the minimum age for buying cigarettes.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: As a result of our long-term tobacco control programme, smoking rates among those aged 18 to 69 years have decreased from 18.3% in 1992 to 13.3% in 2013, based on National Health Survey data. However, over the past three years, smoking rates seemed to have stayed at about 13%. Of concern is also the relatively high smoking rate among our men where nearly one in four smoke (23.1%). We need to do more.

To discourage smoking, we have adopted a multi-pronged approach on tobacco control and public education. HPB has expanded its outreach to help smokers to quit. The number of smokers who took part in HPB's smoking cessation programmes has more than doubled from about 6,000 in 2013 to about 15,000 in 2016.

For youths, we focus on preventing initiation and helping young smokers to stop smoking. HPB works with educators and community organisations to promote smoke-free living among our youth. For example, smoking cessation training workshops are conducted for educators and youth workers to equip them with the skills and strategies to help youth smokers quit the habit. In addition, anti-tobacco messages are incorporated into the curriculum and Student Health Advisors (SHAs) are stationed in some schools to provide counselling to youth smokers.

We need to sustain our efforts to discourage smoking. We are constantly studying various tobacco control initiatives and learning from the experiences of other countries, and will consider adopting suitable measures here, including the possibility of increasing the minimum age for

buying cigarettes.

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PRIZE FOR TOP LITERATURE GCE 'A' LEVEL STUDENT

30 **Mr Kwek Hian Chuan Henry** asked the Minister for Education (Schools) in view of Cambridge International Examinations' discontinuation of the Angus Ross Prize for English literature, whether the Ministry can set up (i) an equivalent A-level literature prize for Singapore and (ii) corresponding A-level literature prizes for mother tongue languages of Malay, Chinese and Tamil.

Mr Ng Chee Meng: The achievements of Singaporean students in the Angus Ross Prize was an additional testimony to the performance of our Literature students. The discontinuation of the Prize is unlikely to have a significant impact on our students' interest in studying Literature at `A' Level. This motivation is more associated with our students' passion for the subject and efforts by our Literature teachers to make the subject come alive for students.

MOE does not award a top academic award for any individual subject, and it is not necessary to start doing so now. While quality performance in examinations remains important, it is more important for us to emphasise the quality of our students' learning experience throughout the entire `A' Level course.

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