

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**  
**SINGAPORE**  
**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
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## CAPACITY OF EXISTING CRISIS SHELTERS

16 **Er Dr Lee Bee Wah** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development (a) how many crisis shelters are there currently; (b) what are their capacities for men and women respectively; and (c) whether the Ministry has plans to expand the number of shelters to accommodate homeless singles.

**Mr Desmond Lee:** Individuals who have exhausted all means of accommodation options, are referred to Transitional Shelters which are funded by the Ministry of Social and Family Development and run by Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs). There are three Transitional Shelters with a total capacity of 156 families and 60 individuals catering to both genders. The allocation between men and women will fluctuate from time to time, depending on need. These shelters are intended to provide temporary accommodation, as social workers from the VWOs work with the families and individuals to address their social issues and work towards securing long-term housing arrangements.

Individuals who are unable to work, have no financial means and do not have accommodation and family support, are admitted to our Welfare Homes. There are 12 Welfare Homes, with a total capacity of about 2300. There are 1250 places for male destitute persons, 250 places for female destitute persons, and the remaining places are in Welfare Homes that cater to both genders. These homes are funded by MSF and managed by VWOs. They help to meet residents' basic needs, as well as help them improve their emotional and physical well-being through rehabilitation programmes.

For victims of family violence, MSF funds Crisis Shelters to provide them with temporary accommodation, while safety plans are mapped out for these women and their families. There are four crisis shelters with a total capacity of 220 beds.

The current capacity of our Shelters and Welfare Homes is sufficient to meet the current needs of individuals and families facing housing issues or crisis. However, MSF is constantly reviewing this as we keep a close watch on intake trends and capacity utilisation of the Shelters and Welfare Homes.

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## **FREELANCERS AND SELF-EMPLOYED FACE HIGHER BARRIERS WHEN APPLYING FOR HDB HOUSING LOAN**

21 **Mr Ong Teng Koon** asked the Minister for National Development (a) whether freelancers and the self-employed face higher barriers when applying for a HDB housing loan compared to salaried workers due to the volatility of their income; and (b) if so, what can the Ministry do to promote the Government's objectives of entrepreneurship and promoting flexibility in the labour market by mitigating the impact of this income volatility.

**Mr Lawrence Wong:** HDB's credit assessment process is designed to assess the financial ability of prospective flat buyers for prudent and long-term sustainable homeownership. Regardless of the nature of the loan applicants' employment, the maximum loan amount is determined based on the applicants' average monthly income.

To ensure a fair assessment of the applicants' income, HDB may require applicants with more variable income to submit documentary proof, or to be credit assessed over a longer period.

For those who have difficulty meeting these requirements, HDB will look into their individual circumstances and exercise flexibility where possible, to help them attain homeownership.

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## **IMPACT OF IMPENDING US TAX CUTS ON SINGAPORE'S ECONOMY**

22 **Mr Gan Thiam Poh** asked the Minister for Finance what is the likely impact on Singapore should the US government reduce their corporate tax rate to 20% and reduce personal income tax.

23 **Mr Liang Eng Hwa** asked the Minister for Finance how will the impending massive corporate tax cuts in the US impact the Singapore economy and its competitiveness as a foreign direct investment destination and whether the corporate tax changes will result in significant US MNCs relocating their operations to onshore US.

**Mr Heng Swee Keat:** As highlighted in the Committee on the Future Economy (CFE) report in 2017, there is increasing competition in the global arena. The current US tax reform includes cut to the headline federal corporate tax rate from 35% to 21%, which is part of the

current global downwards trend in corporate tax rates. The top US marginal personal income tax rate is also reduced from 39.6% to 37%.

Companies with US linkages are likely to be analysing the details of the US tax reform package and reviewing their options. While the reform may enhance the tax competitiveness of US vis-à-vis other countries, companies would take into account non-tax considerations in their investment decisions. Considerations would include a location's business environment, its proximity to markets, availability of skilled manpower and corporate capabilities.

Singapore's corporate tax rate at 17% and top marginal personal income tax rate of 22% are competitive internationally. But we must continue to develop and strengthen our other competitive advantages, by maintaining our pro-business environment and building on our connectivity to the global markets and our strong links to the ASEAN and Asian economies which are expected to continue to grow strongly. We must also continue to deepen the capability of our industries and our people, so that we can continue to stay relevant and attractive to all investors.

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## **MEASURES TO ENSURE SINGAPORE'S WATER SUPPLY IS FREE FROM TERRORIST ATTACKS AND CONTAMINATION**

25 Ms **Joan Pereira** asked the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources what measures are in place to ensure that the water supply from our reservoirs to the water tanks in each building is free from terrorist attacks and contamination.

**Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M:** PUB takes the safety and security of our water supply very seriously.

PUB has stringent security measures to ensure that the water supply from our water treatment plants to the water tanks in each building is safe. All of PUB's water supply installations, such as the water treatment plants and service reservoirs, are designated as protected installations which are physically secured, with tight access control and surveillance.

Treated water from the water treatment plants and service reservoirs is conveyed through a network of buried and pressurised pipelines to customers' premises which prevents attempts to contaminate it. At the customers' end, PUB works with Town Councils, Management Corporation Strata Titles (MCSTs) and building owners to implement measures that ensure the

security of their water service installations including water tanks. These include tight measures to secure water tank covers, as well as restricting water tank access to authorised personnel. PUB conducts regular spot checks on all buildings with water tanks to ensure compliance. Our checks showed that the vast majority of our tanks are properly secured. When we detect non-compliance, we take swift enforcement actions against the building management. To signal the seriousness, penalties amount to a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or imprisonment of not more than 12 months or both. From 2014 to 2017, there were 22 such cases and errant parties have since rectified the lapses.

To complement our security measures, PUB has a comprehensive water sampling and monitoring programme from source to tap. This will ensure that the water supply to customers is safe. Daily water samples are collected from reservoirs, waterworks, distribution systems and customers' taps. The samples are tested at laboratories to ensure no abnormality. Online sensors have been installed at our reservoirs, at each stage of the treatment process and also at strategic locations in the network to keep a close watch on water quality. Over 400,000 tests are conducted annually on physical, organic, inorganic, radiological, bacteriological and microbiological parameters. As an additional layer of checks, PUB submits their water safety and sampling plans to NEA's Drinking Water Unit (DWU) and is required, under the Environmental Public Health (Quality of Piped Drinking Water) Regulations to report any deviations in water quality to NEA's Director-General of Public Health.

PUB takes the issue of drinking water quality and safety very seriously and will continue to do their part to keep safe and secure our water supply, I call upon the public to help by being vigilant and to call the police, or provide feedback via the SGSecure app, if they suspect or observe anything suspicious with regard to our water.

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## **SPORTS HUB AS DEFAULT LOCATION FOR NATIONAL DAY PARADES**

28 **Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap** asked the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth why the Sports Hub has not been designated to be the default location for National Day Parades in future.

**Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien:** The National Day Parade has been held in several locations over the years such as the Padang, the Float@Marina Bay and the National Stadium. While the

Float@Marina Bay ("Float") had been intended as a temporary National Day Parade (NDP) venue when the National Stadium was being redeveloped, it has become popular among Singaporeans over the years for its backdrop of the city skyline, and unobstructed views of show segments such as the Red Lions, aerial display and fireworks finale. It was announced last October that the Float will be redeveloped into NS Square, to commemorate National Service and serve as the primary venue for the NDP going forward. That does not preclude the use of the Sports Hub and the Padang as sites for NDP.

This arrangement allows the Singapore Sports Hub to focus on developing a year-round calendar of events, such as the International Champions Cup (ICC), while providing flexibility to host the NDP in selected years. This is in line with the vision of our Sports Hub as an integrated sports, entertainment and lifestyle hub for the community and our athletes.

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## **BASIC COMPUTER CODING IN PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

30 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for Education (Schools) whether the Ministry will consider introducing basic coding as a part of the curriculum in our primary schools to create a strong childhood grounding in technology in light of the UK, Belgium, Finland, Netherlands, Estonia and Australia's Queensland state having done so.

**Mr Ng Chee Meng:** All our students in primary schools build strong foundation in the fundamental skills that will prepare them for future learning, such as literacy, numeracy and 21st Century Competencies. Some of the skills needed for computational thinking, such as problem solving, logical reasoning and data-handling are developed through the learning of subjects like mathematics and science.

We expose a broad group of students to basic coding and technology through enrichment programmes and co-curricular activities. We work with the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) to offer programmes such as 'Code for Fun', 'Lab on Wheels' and the 'Digital Maker' programmes. Since 2014, 73,000 students have embarked on the 'Code for Fun' programme.

Most of our primary schools also have robotics clubs or info-comm clubs that engage students who are passionate about this area in coding and other computing-related skills, such as developing mobile applications, creating animations, designing computer games and

programming robots.

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## **INCREASING INCOME THRESHOLD QUALIFICATION FOR PARENT RELIEF CLAIMS**

31 **Mr Zainal Sapari** asked the Minister for Finance whether the dependant's annual income threshold of \$4,000 can be increased for tax payers to qualify for Parent Relief claims in order to encourage senior citizens to seek part-time employment.

**Mr Heng Swee Keat:** To encourage and support the employment of seniors, we have put in place measures, including the Special Employment Credit which is paid to employers of older workers, WorkPro which helps employers redesign jobs and workplaces for older workers, and the Workfare Income Supplement which tops up the cash wages and CPF of older low-wage workers.

Tax reliefs such as Parent Relief, Spouse Relief and Qualifying Child Relief are given to taxpayers to recognise their efforts in supporting their family members.

These reliefs are intended for circumstances where the dependent is handicapped, or is not earning any income.

As some dependants may derive a small amount of incidental income, our approach seeks a balance by setting the dependant's income threshold at \$4,000 a year.

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## **REVIEW QUALIFICATION CRITERIA FOR GRANDPARENT CAREGIVER RELIEF CLAIMS**

32 **Mr Zainal Sapari** asked the Minister for Finance whether the eligibility criteria for Grandparent Caregiver Relief claims can be revised to allow for such claims when the caregiver (i) draws income below a certain threshold (ii) spends a majority of the time in the caregiver role and (iii) looks after children up to 16 years old.

**Mr Heng Swee Keat:** The Grandparent Caregiver Relief is given to working mothers who enlist the help of their parents, grandparents, parents-in-law or grandparents-in-laws to take care of their young Singaporean children aged 12 years old or less.

The relief is intended for care-giving for young Singaporean children. We have thus set the age threshold at 12 years old and require the grandparent caregiver not to be working, as the children are young and require adult supervision.

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## **CYBER SECURITY MEASURES FOR NATIONAL ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD SYSTEM**

33 **Ms Joan Pereira** asked the Minister for Health with regard to the mandatory National Electronic Health Record (NEHR) system, whether there are standardised nationwide cyber security measures which all healthcare providers have to adopt in order to protect data from being hacked.

**Mr Gan Kim Yong:** Healthcare providers are required to protect their patient records, including electronic records, and to comply with nationwide cyber-security standards, for the purpose of contributing to and accessing NEHR.

These include installing a secure IT system, using two-factor authentication and regularly updating the anti-virus security software to enhance the protection against cyber-attacks.

MOH will continue to work closely with the Cyber Security Agency and healthcare providers to monitor the cybersecurity threat landscape and put in place additional safeguards when new risks emerge. We will also conduct regular exercises to test the resilience of our systems and maintain a high level of cyber-readiness.

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## **CENTRAL PROCUREMENT FOR COMMON ESSENTIALS ACROSS PUBLIC HOSPITALS**

34 **Ms Sun Xueling** asked the Minister for Health (a) whether a study has been done to analyse the benefits of central procurement for common essentials across public hospitals including software for medical documentation; and (b) whether central procurement can be done selectively to lower the cost of setting up and operating hospitals.

**Mr Gan Kim Yong:** There are benefits and cost savings from the economies of scale achieved through central procurement of common essentials across public healthcare institutions.

Since 2001, the public healthcare clusters have been supported by a centralised Group Procurement Office (GPO). Today, the GPO procures about 90% of standard drugs and 60% of non-standard drugs across our public healthcare clusters. It also covers certain common items such as surgical supplies and contract services. More recently, GPO procurement services have been extended to community hospitals and nursing homes.

On IT procurement, the Integrated Health Information Systems (IHiS) has centrally coordinated IT system purchases to allow public healthcare institutions to benefit from volume discounts. It has also consolidated the data centres of individual institutions for better efficiencies. These have brought about cost savings for our public healthcare system.

We will continue to look for ways to bring about greater efficiencies and cost reductions in the healthcare system through bulk purchase and central procurement, and to pass on the savings to our patients.

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## **OFFENDER'S MENTAL CONDITION CONSIDERED FOR SENTENCE OF REFORMATIVE TRAINING**

37 **Mr Murali Pillai** asked the Minister for Law whether the Ministry will consider expanding the requirement under section 305(3) of the Criminal Procedure Code that the court must call for and consider the Commissioner of Prisons' report on an offender's mental condition for imposition of a sentence of reformatory training to include an independent report from a court-appointed psychiatrist.

**Mr K Shanmugam:** At present, the Reformatory Training (RT) pre-sentencing report mandated under section 305(3) of the Criminal Procedure Code already includes an assessment of an offender's mental condition by a Singapore Prison Service (SPS) psychiatrist. The SPS psychiatrist is a professional who is familiar with the design of the RT regime and how it works to achieve the intended outcomes and benefits for the individuals placed under the regime. He or she would make an independent assessment based on professional judgment.

If the Court deems it necessary, it can exercise its discretion to direct that the SPS psychiatrist be cross-examined, or that further expert evidence or a second opinion be obtained, including from a court-appointed psychiatrist.

It would not be desirable or necessary to impose a general requirement that an independent

report from a court-appointed psychiatrist be obtained in all cases, which will apply even to cases where there is no disagreement with the RT pre-sentencing report. Doing so is likely to prolong the offender's remand period for the further opinion to be prepared.

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## **EFFECTIVENESS OF WORKFARE TRAINING SUPPORT SCHEME IN ENCOURAGING WORKERS TO UPSKILL**

39 **Mr Desmond Choo** asked the Minister for Manpower (a) how has the Workfare Training Support (WTS) been effective in encouraging workers to upskill; and (b) how does WTS operate in tandem with SkillsFuture Initiatives to improve our workforce's overall skills level.

**Mr Lim Swee Say:** Workfare Training Support (WTS) encourages low-wage Singapore Citizens to attend training to upgrade their skills by providing them with substantial course fee subsidies, monetary awards and training allowances. It also supports employers who send their workers for training. Since its inception in July 2010 till December 2017, more than 270,000 unique workers have tapped on WTS to undergo training.

WTS is in line with SkillsFuture, a national movement that provides opportunities for Singaporeans to develop their fullest potential through lifelong learning. For instance, Singaporeans receive up to 90% of enhanced subsidy from SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) when they access a curated set of training programmes under the SkillsFuture Series. But with WTS, eligible low-wage Singapore Citizens are supported with an even higher tier of subsidy, at 95% of course fees. Additionally, absentee payroll for employers, as well as training allowance for trainees without employer support are provided. WTS trainees can also receive the WTS Training Commitment Award, which is a cash award of up to \$400 per year, for undergoing sustained training.

Apart from generous training subsidies, the Government has worked with tripartite partners to put in place other measures to uplift low-wage workers. For example, the Progressive Wage Models in the cleaning, security and landscaping sectors provide clear progression pathways for workers to acquire new skills, take on higher responsibilities and earn higher wages. In addition, the Inclusive Growth Programme provides funding support to companies that undertake productivity improvement projects and share their productivity gains with low-wage

workers.

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## PLANS TO FURTHER DEVELOP SOCIAL SERVICE OFFICES

43 **Mr Teo Ser Luck** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development whether there are any plans to further develop the infrastructure and programmes of the Social Service Offices.

**Mr Desmond Lee:** Our current network of 24 Social Service Offices (SSOs) was set up between 2013 and 2015 to provide more accessible and coordinated assistance to Singaporeans in need. The locations of these SSOs were chosen such that they are situated close to major transport nodes as well as to residents. Today, 95% of ComCare beneficiaries live or work within two kilometres of a SSO.

Infrastructural improvements or relocations are considered and carried out where opportune or needed. For instance, the SSO at Tampines was relocated to Our Tampines Hub, so that its service counters can be co-located with those of other public sector agencies in the Public Service Centre.

Apart from providing ComCare assistance, officers in the SSOs also do ground sensing and local services planning, collaborating with community partners to facilitate a coordinated approach to the planning and delivery of social services in the community. These twin purposes remain unchanged, although we are continually looking into ways to enhance service delivery and make it more client-centric.

For instance, there are ongoing efforts to tighten inter-agency referral processes and facilitate data-sharing between SSOs and other agencies. We are also exploring the potential for more integrated service delivery by piloting at five of our SSOs<sup>1</sup> the delivery of social assistance and employment assistance by the same SSO officer, instead of referring the ComCare beneficiary to a Workforce Singapore (WSG) or e2i officer for employment assistance. For clients who are unemployed but able to work, this provides easier and quicker access to employment assistance. We are also exploring co-locating other complementary services so that our clients can access the services and assistance they require more conveniently and

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<sup>1</sup> These are the SSOs at Kreta Ayer, Taman Jurong, Chua Chu Kang, Jalan Besar and Yishun.

meaningfully. Two of our SSOs<sup>2</sup> have VWO-run Family Services Teams co-located with them as part of another ongoing pilot.

These efforts aim to bring about better coordination across both government agencies and community partners so as to provide necessary and holistic support for those who have fallen on hard times, and enable them to ‘bounce back’ and become self-reliant again.

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## **BAN ON PETROL AND DIESEL-FUELLED VEHICLES**

44 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources whether the Ministry will consider specifying the future date for banning all petrol and diesel-fuelled vehicles.

**Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M:** Vehicle emissions are a source of air pollution locally. Pollutants in vehicle emissions affect our living environment and can harm our health. Combating vehicular pollution is a high priority for my Ministry and our partners across the Government and industry.

We currently have no plans to specify a date to ban petrol and diesel fuelled vehicles. Countries like the United Kingdom and France have adopted this approach, and we are closely monitoring developments. Singapore's vehicular emission policies are technology-neutral and we seek to ensure that our air quality targets can be met in cost-effective ways.

Our air quality targets are benchmarked against standards set by the World Health Organisation. We have policy measures to achieve these targets and these include incentives to encourage the purchase of newer and cleaner vehicles, investment in public transport, support for trials of electric and hybrid vehicles, as well as mandatory requirements such as tightened vehicular emission standards. We will continue to strengthen our policies while ensuring the availability of feasible vehicle models to meet our transport needs.

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<sup>2</sup> These are the SSOs at Kreta Ayer and Taman Jurong.

## RETURNS FROM GOVERNMENT INVESTMENT IN BIOTECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY

46 **Mr Chen Show Mao** asked the Minister for Trade and Industry (Industry) (a) how much has the Government invested in the biotechnology industry over the past 10 years; and (b) what is the return on the Government's investment in the biotechnology industry in terms of benefits to the Singapore economy.

**Mr S Iswaran:** Between 2006 and 2015, the Government invested around \$7.3 billion in the Biomedical Sciences (BMS) sector in Singapore. This includes funding for BMS-related research and development (R&D), developing infrastructure and human capital, and building up translational and clinical research capabilities. The private sector investment commitment to the biomedical manufacturing industry as well as the business expenditure on research and development (BERD) in the BMS-related fields during this period, totalled around \$13.7 billion.

Today, the BMS sector is an important pillar of our economy, contributing about \$26 billion in manufacturing output or 4% of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Singapore is home to more than 50 BMS manufacturing plants, and the sector employs more than 25,000 people.

Singapore's sustained investments in BMS have helped to strengthen our BMS eco-system and build up our capabilities in healthcare, drug development and medical devices innovation. This has also enabled our local enterprises to capture opportunities in the rapidly growing global healthcare market, which is projected to reach US\$2.7 trillion by 2025. From 2010 to 2016, at least 48 local drug-development and related biotech firms were incorporated, double the number in the preceding decade. One local biotech firm, Tessa Therapeutics, recently came into global prominence when it announced a partnership with the renowned Parker Institute for Cancer Immunotherapy. Tessa is currently conducting the world's first US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Phase III cancer T-cell therapy trial.

Notwithstanding these economic outcomes, it should be noted that investments in the BMS sector typically have long gestation periods and require sustained commitment. We will continue to invest in the BMS sector to grow our pool of talent, deepen our capabilities, and strengthen our BMS ecosystem.

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## INVESTIGATION INTO JOO KOON MRT TRAIN ACCIDENT

48 **Dr Lim Wee Kiak** asked the Minister for Transport (a) whether he can give an update on the Ministry's investigation into the Joo Koon MRT train accident; (b) what are the lessons learnt and the steps taken to prevent such incidents; and (c) how serious are the injuries of those injured and whether any person is suffering from a long-term effect of the injuries.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** LTA completed detailed investigations and released a summary of its findings on 18 December 2017. These are consistent with initial findings reported a few days after the collision on 15 November 2017.

The root cause of the collision was a software logic issue with the new Communications-Based Train Control, or CBTC, signalling system. It failed to anticipate and hence could not handle a specific confluence of failure conditions. These conditions, in turn, occurred as a result of complications from operating two signalling systems concurrently on a single line – the new CBTC system on the Tuas West Extension and the old legacy signalling system on the rest of the East-West Line.

The signalling system supplier, Thales, has rectified the system to address the failure conditions which led to the collision. In addition, Thales will set up a CBTC simulation facility in Singapore to strengthen the CBTC testing process. The facility will enable LTA and SMRT to perform additional simulation tests in a controlled setting which is tailored to our local environment and the infrastructural conditions of our rail network, before deploying it on our train services.

As a precautionary measure, we further decided to separate the CBTC operations on the Tuas West Extension from the rest of the East-West Line. The separation will continue until the rest of the East-West Line has fully transitioned to the new CBTC signalling system. Meanwhile, we are speeding up the re-signalling project and the extended engineering hours from MRT early closures and late openings will enable us to complete this transition by the middle of this year.

A total of 37 passengers, including four SMRT staff, sustained injuries from the November 15 collision. All were discharged from hospital within a week of the incident, with most discharged on the same day. Nine require outpatient follow-up treatment and SMRT is in touch with them to provide all necessary support. We expect a full recovery.

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## WELFARE OF CONTRACT WORKERS HIRED BY PUBLIC AGENCIES

49 **Mr Zainal Sapari** asked the Prime Minister (a) what are the deviation or waiver guidelines that allow for rehiring under the Government's contract for Provision of Temporary Contract for Services; (b) how does the Government ensure that these term contract employees' welfare is not compromised when they are hired by the public agencies for 11 months 29 days and rehired after a break of one month; and (c) whether the Government will consider having a separate contract that allows agencies to engage term contract employees for a duration of two or three years.

**Mr Teo Chee Hean (for the Prime Minister):** Individual public agencies may directly hire workers for short-term work or procure temporary manpower services from employment agencies under a demand aggregation contract.

For direct hires, the public agency has an employer-employee relationship with the temporary public officer who is provided with the associated benefits.

For temporary manpower services contracted from employment agencies through the demand aggregation contract, the public agency has a client-contractor relationship with the employment agency. The workers are hired by the employment agencies, which are required to provide for the workers' welfare according to prevailing laws, including the Employment Act, Central Provident Fund Act and other relevant laws.

Similar to public agencies, the employment agencies are also guided by the Tripartite Advisory on the Employment of Term Contract Employees, which provides workers with continuous benefits if the break in work period is less than a month<sup>3</sup>. The Public Service Division has been reminding public agencies and contractors to adhere to the Tripartite Advisory and its intent.

Given that the demand aggregation contract is designed to fulfil temporary needs, the service periods are generally of less than one year duration. However, the Permanent Secretary or Chief Executive Officer of an agency has flexibility to extend with the employment agency, the services of the temporary worker beyond one year, for good reasons such as when the short-

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<sup>3</sup> The Tripartite Advisory is to prevent employers from breaking up work periods indiscriminately such that the worker has to reset his benefit eligibility in the subsequent work period.

term work needs to slightly exceed one year. The workers will continue to enjoy benefits from their employers throughout their engagement period as agreed in their employment contracts.

For work that is more permanent in nature, the Public Service Division advises public agencies to directly recruit individuals as public officers.

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## **ENFORCEMENT OF ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING AND COUNTER-TERRORISM FINANCING LAWS ON BITCOIN CURRENCY**

50 **Ms Foo Mee Har** asked the Prime Minister what levers are available to MAS and law enforcement agencies to enforce anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing laws that use bitcoin currency where conventional oversight mechanisms of the real money market do not apply.

**Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam (for the Prime Minister):** Ms Foo asked how MAS and law enforcement agencies can enforce anti-money laundering and counter-financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) laws on bitcoin currency transactions. When it comes to money laundering or terrorism financing, Singapore's laws do not make any distinction between transactions effected using fiat currency, virtual currency or other novel ways of transmitting value.

Hence, MAS' AML/CFT requirements apply to all activities of financial institutions, whether conducted in fiat or virtual currencies. The Commercial Affairs Department (CAD) is empowered to investigate and prosecute all manner of ML/TF cases. Everyone is required under the law to report suspicious transactions, which they come across in the course of their trade, profession, business or employment, to the Suspicious Transaction Reporting Office in CAD.

MAS recognises that virtual currency transactions, given their anonymous nature, may be used to conceal illicit movement of funds. Further, the absence of a central clearing house for such transactions makes enforcement challenging, as it is difficult to identify the parties upon which enforcement orders can be applied.

However, at some stage, fiat currency will have to be exchanged for virtual currency, or vice versa, at intermediaries that buy, sell or exchange virtual currency. MAS therefore intends to impose AML/CFT requirements on such intermediaries. MAS is currently conducting public consultation on a proposed Payment Services Bill that will empower us to do this.

The virtual currency space is still evolving. Like most innovations, it presents new

opportunities as well as risks. MAS is closely watching these developments and studying the approaches taken in other jurisdictions. The basic idea is for our policies and rules to foster innovation while mitigating risks, including from ML/TF.

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## **RAISING STUDENTS' AWARENESS ON IMPROPER SEXUAL CONDUCT TOWARDS THEM**

51 **Dr Lim Wee Kiak** asked the Minister for Education (Schools) (a) how are schools educating students to report any attempts at improper sexual conduct by any staff member towards them; and (b) whether schools will put up posters to ask students to immediately report to someone in authority if approached to carry out such misconduct.

**Mr Ng Chee Meng:** Students learn about personal safety and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in MOE's Sexuality Education lessons starting from Primary 1 and reinforced throughout their 10 to 12 years of school. They are taught how to recognise sexual abuse and harassment, acquire skills to protect themselves both in real life and online, and understand the laws that protect them in Singapore. They also learn to seek help from trusted adults, such as their parents, teachers and school counsellors when there is risk of their personal safety being compromised.

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## **ENSURING STRONG GOVERNANCE FOR GOVERNMENT FUNDS AND GRANTS**

National Archives of Singapore

54 **Mr Zaqy Mohamad** asked the Minister for Finance (a) whether the Government's current policies and governance of funding and grants are robust; and (b) what other measures is the Ministry considering to strengthen governance across schemes that are administered across the whole of Government.

**Mr Heng Swee Keat:** Singapore has a sound system of governance that delivers good outcomes at relatively lower spending levels compared to many other countries. We achieve this by ensuring that public monies are used appropriately and properly accounted for.

Government agencies commit to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for all programmes

and schemes. These are reviewed regularly to ensure they remain relevant, useful and fulfil their intended outcomes. Value-For-Money reviews are also centrally conducted to assess the cost-effectiveness of key programmes, and often lead to recommendations for further improvements.

The rules in the Government Instruction Manuals and Finance Circulars require agencies to have an effective system of internal audit and financial controls. All agencies are required to report their internal control measures and key internal audit findings to their management and the Ministry of Finance.

For major expenditures, approval is subject to rigorous evaluation. The Gateway process for development projects, for example, involves reviews by a panel of private and public sector technical experts and approval by the Development Planning Committee at the Ministerial level.

Government agencies are subject to independent audits, and the audit scope covers the use of the grants that are disbursed. Agencies also put in place safeguards against abuse, for example, through a system of fraud detection, checks and audits before claims are approved and paid-out.

In addition to these controls, there are learning platforms to promote best practices and share emerging trends on governance and internal controls. For example, the Accountant-General's Department recently issued a guide to help agencies in their grant administration. The guide lays out best practices in grant design, evaluation and approval, project monitoring, and grant disbursement.

On the whole, we have a sound system in place, managed by committed and competent staff. But improving financial governance is an ongoing and continuous journey. We will continue to be vigilant, and take steps to strengthen our risk management practices and safeguards.

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## **IMPACT OF NEW US GUIDELINE OF DEFINING HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE**

**55 Er Dr Lee Bee Wah** asked the Minister for Health in light of the new US guideline defining high blood pressure as 130/80 mmHg (a) what percentage of our population falls within this category; (b) why is the Ministry not adopting this more stringent guideline; and (c) what is being done to raise awareness of hypertension as the 2010 National Health Survey indicates that one in four persons is not aware that they are hypertensive.

**Mr Gan Kim Yong:** The 2017 American Heart Association (AHA) and American College

of Cardiology (ACC) guidelines have defined high blood pressure as 130/80mmHg or higher.

However, the Ministry of Health (MOH) has decided to maintain its definition of hypertension as blood pressure 140/90mmHg or higher in its Clinical Guidelines for Hypertension, after consulting local experts. This value remains the general consensus globally, supported by guidelines from societies such as the International Society of Hypertension, the European Society of Cardiology and the National Heart Foundation of Australia. If Singapore adopted the new AHA guidelines, our hypertension prevalence would double from 21.5% to 43.2%<sup>4</sup>.

Despite the differences in definition, the management approach under the MOH's current and US's newly introduced definition is broadly similar. Under both sets of guidelines, all individuals with hypertension should change their lifestyles, whereas medication is recommended for hypertensive individuals with blood pressure higher than 140/90mmHg. However, specifically for those with cardiovascular risk factors, the US guideline differs from the current general global consensus in recommending initiation of medication at a lower target of 130/80mmHg, after an individual risk assessment. We will continue to monitor developments in this aspect and fine tune our guidelines where necessary.

Hypertension can be effectively prevented through healthy lifestyle habits, such as maintaining a balanced diet and avoiding excess salt intake, regular physical activity and not smoking. For those with hypertension, screening and early detection will facilitate prompt treatment to achieve good health outcomes. The Health Promotion Board (HPB) has introduced many initiatives to encourage individuals to live healthily, as well as go for regular health screening under Screen For Life (SFL). The screening subsidies under HPB's Screen For Life were recently enhanced.

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## **DEVELOPING AFFORDABLE HOME-BASED CARE FOR AGEING POPULATION**

56 **Mr Desmond Choo** asked the Minister for Health (a) how many residents are currently seeking home-based nursing care; (b) what are the current support for lower income families

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<sup>4</sup> Preliminary figures from National Population Health Survey (NPHS) 2017.

seeking home-based nursing care; and (c) what are the long-term plans to develop affordable home-care for our ageing population.

**Mr Gan Kim Yong:** Over 4,200 residents are currently receiving Government subsidies for home-based nursing care provided by MOH-subvented providers. This is an increase of 15% from a year ago. Up to two-thirds of Singaporean households can meet the income criteria for receiving these subsidies. Lower income households will receive higher levels of subsidies, which can be up to 80%.

In addition, the Government also supports caregivers of seniors in other ways. For example, the Seniors' Mobility and Enabling Fund (SMF) provides funding to offset the cost of assistive devices and home healthcare items. Families who need to hire a Foreign Domestic Worker (FDW) to care for frail seniors may be eligible for a concessionary levy, as well as the FDW Grant, to help offset the cost of hiring a FDW.

We aim to expand home-based care service capacity to 10,000 places by 2020. We will also continue to work on the quality and affordability of home and community based care services. For example, we recently introduced "Integrated Home and Day Care" services where home-based care is paired with care at day centres. This flexible model enables seniors to interact with others on days when they are well, and cared for at home on other days. We are currently reviewing the Eldershield scheme to help Singaporeans better prepare for the costs of long term care.

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## **BETTER PLANNING FOR ROAD CLOSURES TO PREVENT DISRUPTION TO ESSENTIAL AND SAFETY SERVICES**

57 **Miss Cheryl Chan Wei Ling** asked the Minister for Home Affairs (a) whether the police, traffic police or other Government agencies were consulted when Ironman Asia planned the road closures for the Standard Chartered Singapore Marathon 2017; (b) if so, whether these agencies provided adequate advice on how the road closures will affect emergency services; and (c) whether future road closures for similar events can be better managed to prevent disruption to essential and safety services.

**Mr K Shanmugam:** The Traffic Police (TP) and Land Transport Authority (LTA)

evaluate applications for road closures very carefully. Apart from the safety and security of the participants of the event, another key consideration is that emergency services such as hospitals must remain accessible. Also, road users and members of the local community, such as residents and business-owners, should not be overly inconvenienced. If the potential inconvenience and disruption to emergency services cannot be adequately addressed, the application will be rejected.

For the Standard Chartered Singapore Marathon 2017 (SCSM 2017), Ironman Asia, the Event Organiser, submitted an application for road closures. TP and LTA evaluated it in consultation with Sport Singapore (SportSG) and SCDF.

As part of the evaluation, the initial proposed road closures were significantly reduced in scale, to minimise the impact to the public, and ensure that establishments such as hospitals remained accessible. LTA also conducted a walk-through with Ironman Asia before the event.

Raffles Hospital was consulted by Ironman Asia and agreed to the road closure plans. In particular, it was agreed that the portion of North Bridge Road between Rochor Road and Ophir Road would be converted into a two-way road, to allow vehicles to access the hospital via Rochor Road. In the event that emergency vehicles were required to travel within the road closure areas, access would be facilitated by Auxiliary Police outriders, who would escort the emergency vehicles.

The road closure permit required Ironman Asia to comply with and execute these approved road closure plans. Arising from public feedback on the traffic management at SCSM 2017, TP, together with LTA and SportSG, are looking into whether Ironman Asia had fulfilled all permit conditions and complied with the road closure plans.

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## **MANPOWER CHALLENGES FACING AUXILIARY POLICE FORCES**

58 **Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan** asked the Minister for Home Affairs (a) what are the manpower challenges facing the auxiliary police forces; and (b) what are the Ministry's considerations when allowing the deployment of foreign auxiliary police officers at security sensitive locations.

**Mr K Shanmugam:** Auxiliary Police Forces (APFs) are important partners to the Home Team. Auxiliary Police Officers (APOs) are deployed for a range of security functions, including

protecting sensitive installations and providing security at major events. The APFs are regulated by the Singapore Police Force.

The demand for APOs will grow due to the rising threat from terrorism, and major infrastructure projects that require security manpower like Changi Airport Terminal 4 and the new Tuas Port.

Our clear preference is to recruit Singaporean APOs to meet this rising demand. The APFs have made significant efforts to do so, for example, providing signing and retention bonuses, and enhancing career progression. This has allowed the APFs to add over 300 Singaporean APOs over the past year. But this is still not enough to meet the projected demand over the next few years. There is a manpower shortage everywhere.

Local workforce growth is slowing, and it is difficult for the APFs to find enough Singaporean candidates who meet the requirements. To meet the shortage, we have allowed the APFs to hire Malaysian APOs. But even that pool has been shrinking, and our APFs have been finding it difficult to recruit enough Malaysian officers who meet the requirements. They needed to look for officers from other countries. Thus, the Minister for Home Affairs said in this House in 2017 that we will allow APFs to recruit Taiwanese APOs.

In deciding where non-Singaporean APOs can be deployed, MHA considers the operational needs and risks specific to each security-sensitive location. Our requirement was that land checkpoints, for example, be manned only by Singaporean APOs – and that has been said in this House.

But operational needs are growing significantly, everywhere, including our checkpoints.

Visitor numbers are growing, and at the same time, the threats of terrorism have risen substantially. The security situation has become more complex, requiring more officers.

Therefore, we have decided to allow Taiwanese APOs to be deployed at the land checkpoints alongside Singaporean APOs, because there are not enough Singaporean APOs available.

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## **SUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS FOR LEASE BUYBACK SCHEME**

59 **Mr Gan Thiam Poh** asked the Minister for National Development (a) to date, what has been the number of successful applications for the Lease Buyback Scheme since its launch; (b) whether the payouts has been affected by the falling HDB resale prices and rental income; and

(c) what has been the average payout for each applicant.

**Mr Lawrence Wong:** The Lease Buyback Scheme (LBS) was implemented on 1 March 2009. As at 30 November 2017, about 2,500 households have taken up the scheme.

The LBS proceeds for each household is dependent on the market value of the flat at the time of application. Specifically, the LBS proceeds are the market value of the flat with its full remaining lease, minus the value of the lease retained by the household and any outstanding monies due to HDB.

The average LBS proceeds among the households who have benefited from the scheme to date is about \$146,000.

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## REDUCING OCCURRENCES OF FALLING WINDOWS

60 **Mr Melvin Yong Yik Chye** asked the Minister for National Development what plans, beyond public education, does the Ministry have to reduce the occurrences of falling windows.

**Mr Lawrence Wong:** Public education is only part of a multi-pronged approach Government takes to reduce the occurrence of falling windows. First, there are upstream design and performance requirements for window systems to ensure that structural frames, hinges and other components can safely support the weight of the whole window system.

Second, windows can only be installed by approved contractors that are registered with the Building and Construction Authority (BCA). These contractors must have trained installers who have taken a course on window safety and who have at least 12 months of practical experience.

Third, home owners also play an important role in ensuring that their windows are properly and regularly maintained. Under the Building Maintenance and Strata Management Act, BCA can issue Notices to owners to repair and maintain their windows if they are found to be poorly maintained. If a window falls due to lack of maintenance, the person responsible could be subject to a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or both.

The BCA will take enforcement action against home owners or contractors who contravene the requirements. We will continue to work with home owners to reduce the risk of falling windows.

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## INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKS TO TRACK RELIABILITY AND SAFETY OF MRT SYSTEM

61 **Mr Gan Thiam Poh** asked the Minister for Transport (a) what are the assumptions for the 2020 target of 1,000,000 mean kilometres between failures (MKBF) that have been made for our MRT system; (b) what other international benchmarks are available to track the reliability and safety of our MRT system; and (c) whether the Ministry will consider designing new yardsticks to better reflect the actual experiences of commuters

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** Two years ago, I challenged the rail operators to significantly improve the reliability of our MRT services and make them among the most reliable in the world. We launched a multi-year effort to bring this about and actively track our performance against the best in class. The Taipei Metro and Hong Kong MTR were picked as our benchmarks, using MKBF (Mean Kilometres Between Failure for delays exceeding five minutes) as the objective measure of train reliability.

As Taipei and Hong Kong were able to achieve an MKBF of 800,000 train-km, I set that as our target. Last year, after Taipei achieved an MKBF of 1 million train-km, I updated our 2020 target to 1 million train-km, as I am determined to close the reliability gap with the best in class. It is a stretch target, but with determination and focus, it is within our grasp. We will also speed up our asset renewal programmes and continue to add new lines to enhance the resilience of our rail network.

MKBF is an internationally recognised indicator for rail reliability. There are industry groups of large, medium and small metros, such as CoMET (Community of METros) and Nova which publish MKBF data for benchmarking by peers. Based on their data, there are only a handful of metros globally that have achieved an MKBF of 1 million train-km or better.

We have focused on train reliability as the key area for improvement. However, commuter experience is shaped by a host of other factors like safety, punctuality, cleanliness and comfort. LTA tracks all these indicators too. In addition, the Public Transport Council monitors commuter experience through its annual Public Transport Customer Satisfaction Survey.

We have some way to go before we reach our MKBF target of 1 million train-km. Recent setbacks have affected commuters' perception of the progress we have made. We are re-doubling

our efforts and we seek commuters' patience and understanding.

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## **HIGHER INCIDENCE OF FIRES DUE TO CHARGING OF BATTERIES FOR PERSONAL MOBILITY DEVICES**

62 **Ms Joan Pereira** asked the Minister for Transport in view of the increasing number of fires due to personal mobility devices being charged, whether the Ministry will consider (i) implementing measures to ensure that only approved devices can be imported and (ii) introducing penalties for the import, possession and usage of uncertified devices.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** We are concerned about the recent spate of fires involving personal mobility devices (PMDs). Currently, the power adaptors used to charge PMDs must comply with the Consumer Protection (Safety Requirements) Regulations (CPSR) administered by SPRING. The adaptors must be type-tested and certified compliant with the relevant safety standards, registered with SPRING, and carry the SAFETY Mark before they can be sold in Singapore. LTA and SPRING Singapore are assessing if similar product safety requirements can be imposed on PMDs or their batteries.

In the meantime, I urge consumers to exercise caution, such as buying PMDs from reputable sources and avoiding the overcharging of batteries. Consumers should avoid modifying their PMDs or tampering with the electrical components of the PMDs.

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## **IMPACT OF EXTENDED ENGINEERING HOURS ON MRT RAIL MAINTENANCE WORKS**

68 **Mr Melvin Yong Yik Chye** asked the Minister for Transport (a) whether the extended engineering hours provided to SMRT as a result of the early closure and late opening of train services in December 2017 have benefited rail maintenance works; and (b) whether the Ministry will consider such early closure and late opening of train services on a more regular basis in 2018.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** Last month, extended engineering hours through early closure and late opening of 19 MRT stations in the western sector of the North-South and East-West Lines

were provided to SMRT. The adjustments in operating hours over four weekends, including two full Sunday closures, more than doubled the total number of engineering hours available between Friday nights and Monday mornings in December 2017, from 45 hours to 110 hours.

The extended engineering hours have been extremely useful for our engineering and maintenance teams. First, they have enabled LTA, SMRT and signalling system supplier Thales to accelerate the re-signalling of the East-West Line. Each weekend of extended engineering hours has allowed Thales to conduct the equivalent of five regular nights of site acceptance testing. Second, they have allowed SMRT to bring forward and intensify maintenance works and repairs of the running rails, station equipment and track circuits. They have also enabled LTA to conduct more maintenance inspections to ensure the quality of SMRT's maintenance works, especially those by outsourced contractors. Third, they have allowed LTA and SMRT to speed up the installation of noise barriers for the stretch between the Dover and Boon Lay MRT stations. On each weekend, the project team was able to make progress equivalent to four nights of normal engineering hours.

For these reasons, LTA and SMRT have announced similar plans for this month, involving the early closure and late opening of 10 East-West Line stations in the eastern sector over four weekends, including two full Sunday closures. Reduced train operating frequencies will also be in effect for seven North-South Line stations in the central area over the same period, as one track will be closed for maintenance.

Beyond January, we will extend engineering hours where possible so that we can complete the re-signalling of the East-West Line by the middle of the year. We are bringing forward the renewal of other critical systems on the North-South and East-West Lines, such as the power system and track circuits. We are also making plans to speed up the installation of noise barriers.

LTA will work closely with the Public Transport Operators to provide commuters affected by extended engineering hours with timely information and alternative transport arrangements. We are also working closely with the union to ensure that these plans are sustainable for our rail and bus workers. I would like to thank our public transport workers for their dedication, and seek commuters' continued understanding as we redouble efforts to improve train reliability.

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## RIGHTS OF INDIVIDUALS ASSISTING IN POLICE INVESTIGATIONS

69 **Mr Chen Show Mao** asked the Minister for Home Affairs (a) under what laws, regulations or other authority are individuals' right to travel restricted when they are assisting in police investigations but not under arrest themselves; and (b) what limits apply to the exercise of any police powers to restrict travel and what recourse is available to appeal against any such exercise.

**Mr K Shanmugam:** Section 112 of the Criminal Procedure Code empowers Police officers of or above the rank of Sergeant to require a person to surrender his travel document. There are two requirements. Firstly, the Police officer must have reasonable grounds to believe that the person has committed an offence. Secondly, the Police officer must obtain the written consent of an authorised officer. This is a Police officer of or above the rank of Deputy Superintendent, who is specifically authorised by the Commissioner of Police. Section 112 can be used regardless whether the person has been arrested.

Section 113 allows a person who has surrendered his travel document to apply to the Police for the return of his travel document. The Police will review such applications. If the application is refused, the person may then apply to a District Judge for the return of his travel document.

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## IMPACT ON BUSINESS OPERATIONS CAUSED BY SUSPENSION OF MRT SERVICES ON TUAS WEST EXTENSION

70 **Assoc Prof Randolph Tan** asked the Minister for Transport whether the suspension of MRT services on the Tuas West Extension in mid-November 2017 has had a significant negative impact on the operations of firms served by the affected segment of the MRT system.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** Following the train collision at Joo Koon MRT station on 15 November 2017, train services on the Tuas West Extension from Tuas Link to Gul Circle stations were suspended from Thursday, 16 November to Sunday, 19 November 2017 to allow LTA, SMRT and Thales to perform safety checks on the signalling system.

The suspension of services had disrupted commuters' routine and their employers, but the

impact was manageable. During the suspension period, bridging buses were deployed between Joo Koon and Tuas Link stations at headways of three to five minutes. We also enhanced the bus services in the area. Some companies also engaged private buses to ferry their staff to and from Joo Koon or Pioneer MRT stations during the peak periods.

I am grateful to commuters and employers for their patience and understanding during the service suspension, and I seek their continued support as the Tuas West Extension remains segregated from the rest of the East-West Line to allow Thales to complete the re-signalling work safely and speedily.

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## NATIONAL SMARTPHONE NAVIGATION APP FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT

72 **Dr Tan Wu Meng** asked the Minister for Transport whether LTA has assessed the feasibility of developing a national smartphone navigation app for public transport that acquires, aggregates and analyses (i) real-time bus and train data from public transport operators (ii) end-user location and velocity data volunteered by app users' smartphones and (iii) user reports of transport delays or breakdowns.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** There are currently a number of such smartphone apps serving commuters' different needs. LTA's myTransport app provides commuters with essential public transport information based on real-time data, including traffic updates, bus arrival times and crowdedness. Transport operators create their own apps to serve their customers and may also pull in data from public sources to enrich their app content. For example, the SMRT-Connect travel app helps users plan their journeys by providing real-time information such as arrival timings for buses and trains. There are also third party apps such as Google Maps and Citymapper which help users plan their journeys, drawing on many data sources including information volunteered by end-users.

We welcome such efforts, as they can individually or collectively serve specific commuter needs. Our job is to facilitate such development by making data open through Data.gov.sg and LTA's DataMall so that private developers can co-create smarter transport solutions with us.

In particular, there is potential to collect end-user locations and provide train service disruption notifications as suggested by the Member. As commuter needs evolve, LTA will add more data to DataMall and introduce new features to its mobile app. Transport operators like

SMRT have also shared plans to enhance their own app content by providing information on platform and train loading based on analysis of data collected from wifi access points and camera feeds.

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**SPEED REDUCTION AND OTHER MEASURES ADOPTED BY BUS DRIVERS  
TO AVOID BEING PENALISED FOR RETURNING EARLIER-THAN-  
SCHEDULED TO BUS INTERCHANGES**

73 **Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap** asked the Minister for Transport whether there are any measures in place to prevent bus drivers from reducing their driving speed and deliberately stopping at bus-stops longer than necessary so as to avoid being penalised for arriving back at the interchange too early.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** Bus bunching was a common complaint among commuters. In response, we have introduced the Bus Service Reliability Framework to get bus operators to improve the punctuality and reliability of their bus services. It requires bus captains to adjust their speeds to maintain a consistent headway between buses, thus minimising bus bunching. They do not deliberately stop at bus stops longer than necessary. More regular bus intervals will benefit bus commuters as it reduces waiting time and spreads passenger loads more evenly.

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