

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
SINGAPORE
OFFICIAL REPORT
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OWNERSHIP OF HDB FLATS OF DECEASED SINGAPOREANS WITH FOREIGN SPOUSES AND CHILDREN

33 **Mr Darryl David** asked the Minister for National Development what happens to HDB flats that belong to (i) a Singaporean with a foreign spouse who is not a PR or citizen should the Singaporean spouse pass away and (ii) a Singaporean with a foreign spouse who is not a PR or citizen who has Singaporean children who are minors, should the Singaporean spouse pass away.

Mr Lawrence Wong: A non-citizen spouse can retain the flat following the demise of the Singaporean spouse-owner if he/she becomes a Singaporean or permanent resident (PR) within a one-year period, or if he/she includes a Singaporean or PR family member who is at least 21 and satisfies the eligibility rules and conditions to own a flat.

If the non-citizen widow or widower has Singaporean children who are minors, HDB can consider exercising flexibility, on a case-by-case basis, for the flat to be held in trust by a Singaporean or PR trustee, on the condition that the flat is to be given to the Singaporean children when they reach 21 years old.

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SUCCESS RATE OF APPLICANTS GETTING BTO FLATS UNDER MARRIED CHILD PRIORITY SCHEME

34 **Mr Liang Eng Hwa** asked the Minister for National Development (a) since the Married Child Priority Scheme (MCPS) was launched, how many buyers who applied for a BTO flat under the Scheme have been successful and unsuccessful in getting a flat respectively; and (b) whether there is sufficient help for buyers to live near their parents for mutual care and support.

Mr Lawrence Wong: The current quota-based Married Child Priority Scheme (MCPS) was implemented in end-2014. In 2015, about 1,600 applications for BTO flats in non-mature estates made under MCPS were successful. This translates to a success rate of about 85%. The success rate for BTO flats in mature estates under MCPS is lower at about 47%, given the high demand for and limited supply of such flats. Nonetheless, the success rates for MCPS applicants

in both mature and non-mature estates are still higher than that for public applicants.

Helping families live near one another for mutual care and support has been a longstanding priority for the Government. Today, we set aside up to 45% of the public flat supply for MCPS applicants. If the demand still outstrips supply under the MCPS quota, unsuccessful MCPS applicants will also have another chance to ballot for a new flat with other public applicants.

Besides MCPS, HDB also has other schemes and policies to help families live with or near one another. These include:

- i) The Multi-Generation Priority Scheme, which gives priority to parents and married child who jointly apply for the same BTO project;
- ii) The Three-Generation (3Gen) flats, which are purpose-built to cater to multi-generation living under one roof;
- iii) Allowing parents or married child who are buying a resale flat to live with or near each other, to benefit from the Proximity Housing Grant of \$20,000; and
- iv) Setting the income ceiling for subsidised housing at a higher level for extended families who are buying a flat to live together.

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PROFESSIONAL SKILLS TRAINING ELEMENTS IN SKILLSFUTURE COURSES

35 **Miss Cheryl Chan Wei Ling** asked the Acting Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) (a) what percentage of existing SkillsFuture courses has elements associated with professional skills training; (b) whether customisation of courses is allowed to cater to the needs of different industries; and (c) whether the Ministry will consider a SkillsFuture package tailored for women planning to transit back to the workforce to enable them to have skills that are relevant to current market demand.

Mr Ong Ye Kung: There is a wide range of skills-based courses that are eligible for the SkillsFuture Credit. As of 31 July 2016, there are over 15,000 courses listed in the SkillsFuture Credit directory. When including courses, we ensure they are skills-based, ie, they must be professionally useful to the trainee, depending on their vocational needs.

Today, the SkillsFuture Credit course directory lists courses in over 50 areas of training. These cover the key sectors of our economy. SSG is continually working with public agencies

and professional bodies to include more courses into the SkillsFuture Credit course directory, so as to cater to industry demand and individuals' skills training needs.

Various segments, such as retrenched PMETs, older workers, or women, will need additional support. The challenge is not the lack of training courses for them, but having effective guidance. For example, a back-to-work woman may need to sharpen her language skills, be comfortable with using IT, and learn service or manufacturing skills, before going back to work. The courses are all there, but she will need the advice, and must have a positive mind-set.

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IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR RECENT GRADUATES

36 **Ms Sun Xueling** asked the Acting Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) (a) whether recent graduates who are seeking employment can leverage on the universities' resources to seek internships and market exposure opportunities; and (b) whether there is a central database maintained by public agencies or institutions of higher learning for which young graduates can have access to for internship opportunities.

Mr Ong Ye Kung: Internships are important in allowing students to apply their knowledge and skills in a realistic work environment, facilitate their transition into the workplace upon graduation, and enhance their chances of finding suitable employment after graduation.

Therefore, the Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) facilitate opportunities for as many students as possible to take on internships before they graduate.

Autonomous Universities (AUs), such as the Singapore Management University (SMU), Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), and Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), require students to complete internships before they can graduate. National University of Singapore (NUS) and the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) actively facilitate internships but do not make it a requirement for all students.

However, they do not facilitate internships for graduates as internships are part of the education process for undergraduates.

Our AUs also provide career services to fresh graduates. Examples of their services include personalised career counselling, industry networking events and professional development workshops.

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SUBSIDIES FOR IMMUNISATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND ELDERLY

37 **Miss Cheng Li Hui** asked the Minister for Health whether the Ministry will consider extending the full subsidies for compulsory childhood immunisations recommended under the National Childhood Immunisation Programme for all children who are Singapore citizens at private GP clinics.

38 **Miss Cheng Li Hui** asked the Minister for Health whether the Ministry will consider providing free immunisations against influenza, T-dap, pneumococcal pneumonia (both Pneumo23 and Pneumo13) and herpes zoster infections for elderly Singaporeans.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: The Ministry of Health (MOH) is guided by the Expert Committee on Immunisation (ECI)'s recommendations, in deciding on the use of Medisave and provision of subsidies. Medisave use is allowed for all recommended vaccinations. We also provide full subsidies at the polyclinics for children who are Singaporean citizens for vaccines that are recommended for preventing disease outbreaks in the community, such as the compulsory childhood vaccinations for measles and diphtheria.

Medisave can be used for influenza and Pneumo23 vaccines recommended for high-risk groups, such as the elderly and suffering from chronic diseases. Based on the ECI's advice in August 2016, MOH is reviewing the use of Medisave for the Pneumo13 vaccine.

In addition, subsidies for influenza have been extended to Singaporeans who are subsidised residents in nursing homes. The ECI does not recommend diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus and herpes zoster vaccinations for the elderly.

Currently, every Singapore citizen baby receives a \$4,000 government grant in their Medisave accounts. This grant can be used for medical expenses, and all vaccinations under the National Childhood Immunisation Schedule (NCIS). There are also other government measures, such as the Baby Bonus scheme, which can also be used for NCIS vaccinations, including at accredited private GP and paediatrician clinics. Through Medisave and the Baby Bonus, the cost of these vaccinations are thus fully supported by Government even at private clinics.

MOH will continue to review our vaccination policies based on professional inputs from the ECI, to ensure accessibility and affordability for Singaporeans.

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ENHANCING HOME-BASED CARE OPTIONS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN, ELDERLY AND DISABLED

40 **Miss Cheryl Chan Wei Ling** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development what are the plans or considerations for enhancing home-based care options for young children, seniors and the disabled.

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin: The family plays a critical role in the care of young children, seniors and the disabled. Family members not only provide physical care, but are also an important source of emotional support and love. The Government recognises this, and has put in place a comprehensive suite of support schemes and initiatives to help families care for their loved ones within the home environment.

To support parents in caring for and bonding with their newborns, the Government has been progressively enhancing parental leave provisions, such as maternity, paternity, and shared parental leave over the years. From January 2017, the second week of paternity leave will be mandatory, and from July 2017, shared parental leave will be increased from 1 to 4 weeks.

To further support parents with their caregiving expenses, which may include expenses for home-based care, the Baby Bonus Cash Gift was enhanced last year with the Baby Bonus Plus of \$2,000.

The Government has also stepped up efforts to support families in caring for their seniors at home. In the past five years, we have made care more accessible by expanding home-based care capacity, which includes services such as home visits by doctors and nurses, from 3,800 places to 6,900 places. We have also increased centre-based care capacity from 2,100 day places to 3,500 day places, and are growing these capacities further to 10,000 home places and 6,200 day places respectively by 2020.

MOH has also launched a Home & Community Care Masterplan to enable seniors to grow old at home. Initiatives under the plan include (i) training and assessing a new "corps" of domestic eldercarers so that they can anchor good care for seniors at home, (ii) expanding community befriending programmes to strengthen the support network for seniors and their families, (iii) piloting a new model of care that provides home and centre-based care flexibly to

meet seniors' needs more holistically; and (iv) investing in research and innovation to pioneer new and better ways of caring for our seniors at home.

The Government further supports caregivers of seniors by putting in place respite services, and defraying caregiving costs through schemes such as Caregiver Training Grant and Seniors' Mobility and Enabling Fund.

Caregivers of loved ones with disabilities can develop or enhance their care skills with the support of the Caregivers' Training Grant. They can also approach caregiver support centres at Voluntary Welfare Organisations and Special Education schools. In addition, the Government has started a pilot on Home-Based Care Services for Persons with Disabilities aged 16 and above. The pilot provides therapy, personal hygiene care, house-keeping and medication reminder services, to enable Persons with Disabilities to live in their own home, with family, friends and neighbours in the community, and to support their caregivers in the provision of care.

Caregivers requiring the assistance of a Foreign Domestic Worker to care for young children, seniors, or their loved ones with disability are eligible to pay a lower monthly levy as well. They pay a concessionary levy rate of \$60 per month, which is \$205 less than usual. Those caring for the elderly and Persons with Disabilities at home, whose monthly per capita income is less than \$2,600, are also supported through a monthly grant which offsets the cost of hiring a foreign domestic worker.

The family is the first and most important line of support. The Government remains committed to support families to care for their loved ones within the home environment.

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CPR TRAINING FOR ALL NATIONAL SERVICEMEN

41 **Miss Cheng Li Hui** asked the Minister for Defence whether the SAF will train all servicemen on techniques of cardiopulmonary resuscitation and use of the automated external defibrillator considering that it is a basic and crucial form of first-aid in the event of a terror attack.

Dr Ng Eng Hen: Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and the use of an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) are medical skills that are important both during SAF training and in operations. During Basic Military Training (BMT), all recruits are trained in basic first aid. Since September 2010, they are also trained in CPR and use of AED. In addition, servicemen

deployed as instructors in SAF Training Institutes and in medical vocations undergo regular CPR and AED training. Operationally-ready NSmen in medical vocations are also required to attend CPR and AED training, during their in-camp training. SAF's CPR and AED training programme is accredited by the National Resuscitation Council.

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SECURITY LAPSE IN CASE WHERE NSMAN TOOK INDIVIDUAL PHYSICAL PROFICIENCY TEST ON BEHALF OF ANOTHER

42 **Er Dr Lee Bee Wah** asked the Minister for Defence with regard to the recent case where an NSman took the Individual Physical Proficiency Test (IPPT) on behalf of another NSman (a) how did he gain entry into the camp and whether there was a security lapse; and (b) whether a review was carried out to tighten the security following this incident.

Dr Ng Eng Hen: MINDEF takes a serious view of this case. Cheating goes against the core values of the SAF. Every serviceman is expected to uphold a high standard of integrity and those caught cheating in the IPPT are punished. While IPPT is an individual responsibility, SAF commanders must lead by example and their units shoulder the collective responsibility to maintain fitness and performance. Officers and warrant officers caught cheating are no longer fit to command and can have their ranks removed.

In the cases involving cheating of IPPT, the NSmen had handed over their identity card to the impersonator to use to enter the camp and take the IPPT. Facial checks are conducted at entry points by sentry guards, but subject to human error especially when large numbers are processed during IPPT sessions. The SAF acknowledges this lapse and verification measures have since been stepped up at the camp gate, and IPPT registration counter and stations.

But the more secure system is to utilise technology to reduce human error. To strengthen security of entry into SAF camps, biometric fingerprinting has been progressively introduced since 2015. By 2018, all personnel including NSmen taking their IPPT there will be required to undergo Biometric Fingerprinting to enter into SAF camps.

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EMPLOYMENT RATE OF GRADUATES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS

43 **Mr Desmond Choo** asked the Acting Minister for Education (Schools) (a) what is the current employment rate of graduates of special education schools; and (b) what are the efforts to help special needs Singaporeans to find employment.

Mr Ng Chee Meng: Each year, about 300 students graduate from the SPED schools. Due to the diverse range of disability profiles, these students have different degrees of readiness for work or further studies. About one in three move on to regular employment in a wide range of industries, including Retail, Hospitality, Medical Services, and Food & Beverage. About half move on to sheltered workshops or day activity and care centres. About 10% move on to further studies.

A proactive, whole-of-government approach is adopted in helping students and persons with disabilities gain employment in order to live independently and be integrated in society.

MOE has put in place various measures to better prepare students in SPED schools for employment.

a. A Framework for Vocational Education guides SPED schools to develop a structured curriculum to equip students with life skills and work habits to be employable. This includes participation in authentic and structured work experience.

b. Students who obtained either the ITE Skills Certification at Metta School or Workforce Skills Qualification at Delta Senior School may apply for jobs in the open market or attend further training as long as they meet the pre-requisites for the courses, eg, the National ITE Certificate.

Persons with disabilities can seek employment assistance and training opportunities from SG Enable.

In 2014, MOE collaborated with MSF and SG Enable to develop the School-to-Work (S2W) Transition Programme for students who have potential for work but may not benefit from the certification programmes. The programme begins in the student's final year of schooling and continues for up to one year after he/she graduates. This allows SG Enable to work with students and their families in the final schooling year to place students in appropriate jobs or job training pathways based on their interests, strengths and preferences. After they graduate, students receive customised job training, including structured internships with support from Job Coaches, to prepare them for eventual employment.

SG Enable also provides internship opportunities for special needs students in tertiary institutions.

Employers may approach SG Enable for advice on, and support for, employing persons with disabilities. They can use the Open Door Programme for funding job redesign, workplace modification and training; and can also benefit from the Special Employment Credit when they hire persons with disabilities to offset cost of wages.

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CULTIVATING INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOLS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

44 **Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong** asked the Acting Minister for Education (Schools) (a) beyond having the assistance of allied educators, how does the Ministry ensure that all mainstream schools provide a suitable and inclusive environment for their special needs students where all students can learn to respect differences and develop empathy; and (b) what is the number of special needs students who have switched from mainstream schools to special education schools in each of the past five years and what are the top three reasons given by the students or their parents for the switch.

Mr Ng Chee Meng: All teachers have the basic professional awareness of special needs. Some teachers undergo more training to enable them to plan and differentiate the instructional strategies to support the learning of these students. With greater awareness and knowledge in special needs, teachers are also able to inculcate empathy and respect of differences in their students, and to foster an inclusive class culture.

Students learn specific ways to demonstrate care for people with special needs, such as reaching out to make friends, including them in activities and volunteering to help them. Beyond the classroom lessons, Co-Curricular Activities and Values in Action programmes also create opportunities for students to interact and put their values into practice.

Over the past five years, about 180 students each year, mostly at the primary level, have moved on to SPED schools. These are students with severe special educational needs and behavioural issues.

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REDUCING PAY-TV RATES WITH CONTENT REDUCTION

46 **Mr Yee Chia Hsing** asked the Minister for Communications and Information whether the Ministry can consider requiring pay-TV service providers to reduce their subscription charges on a pro-rata basis when the TV programming content is reduced as consumers may have subscribed to pay-TV services that are bundled with mobile and internet access and the option to cancel pay-TV services alone may not result in savings.

Assoc Prof Dr Yaacob Ibrahim: When reviewing consumer protection measures last year, MDA had considered having pay-TV operators reduce their subscription charges on a pro-rata basis when certain channels in a subscription bundle are no longer provided. After getting views from stakeholders on this proposal through a public consultation, MDA decided not to proceed with it.

The value of a channel or a programme within a bundle can be subjective, and vary from consumer to consumer. Also, pay-TV operators may offer other similar channels in place of the discontinued ones. During our focused group discussions, consumers provided feedback to MDA that instead of reducing charges on a pro-rata basis, they prefer to be given the option to exit without early termination charges.

After careful consideration, MDA decided not to proceed with the proposal. To protect the interests of pay-TV subscribers, MDA introduced other measures in April 2016. These include allowing subscribers to exit their contracts without early termination charges when the pay-TV operators: (a) raise subscription prices; (b) remove a material channel or sports content; or (c) remove 20% or more of the total number of channels subscribed. To retain their subscribers, pay-TV operators would need to take mitigating actions when they make these changes, including offering rebates on subscription fees.

We believe this is a better way to safeguard consumers' interests, while allowing the industry to innovate and remain commercially viable.

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PENSION PAYMENTS IN PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL REPORTS

49 **Mr Png Eng Huat** asked the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth (a) what is the rationale for pension contributions of \$366,000 and \$802,000 for 2016 and 2015 respectively as reported in the PA's Annual Report for 2015/16, when the pension scheme no longer exists;

(b) why have these amounts been previously classified as "termination benefits" in past reports; and (c) who are the beneficiaries of these payments.

Mr Chan Chun Sing (for the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth): These pension contributions were paid to staff who were already on pension schemes, who were either (i) transferred to the People's Association (PA) from then-Ministry of Community Development in 1993; or (ii) seconded to PA from their parent organisations. PA no longer has a pension scheme.

Second, these contributions consist of once-off retention bonuses paid to junior grade officers upon fulfilment of their contract terms as per common industry practice.

The term "termination benefits" in past Annual Reports was renamed as "pension contributions" to better reflect the nature of such payments.

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IMPROVING DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OF DEMENTIA

50 Ms Joan Pereira asked the Minister for Health (a) what measures will be implemented to improve the diagnosis and treatment of dementia; (b) whether there is capacity to provide palliative care in dementia treatment; and (c) what support is available to the families of dementia patients.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: Dementia is a term used to describe the symptoms and clinical features reflecting the gradual deterioration in cognitive ability.

Early and accurate diagnosis is key to good management of dementia. MOH has been expanding the capacity of memory clinics in our public hospitals to provide early diagnosis and management for dementia patients. Between 2011 and 2016, the number of attendances in our memory clinics increased from about 7,500 attendances to more than 13,000 attendances. In addition, through staff training and reconfiguration of wards, public hospitals are better equipped to care for general patients who also have dementia. Public hospitals also collaborate with primary care providers through joint consultations and case discussions to support persons with dementia.

MOH also supports persons with dementia and their families in the community through various ways. First, we are enhancing community support and raising dementia awareness

through initiatives such as public education campaigns, dementia resource toolkits and community resource, engagement and support teams (CREST teams). Second, we are strengthening the capability of care staff and caregivers in supporting those with dementia. Between 2013 and 2015 for example, AIC offered over 2,400 training places in dementia-related courses and talks. AIC also provides a Caregivers' Training Grant to caregivers, including foreign domestic workers, to attend many of such courses. Finally, we are expanding community-based and home-based dementia care services. We aim to increase the number of dementia day care services by three-folds to 3,000 places by 2020.

We recognise the importance of expanding palliative care for those who have advanced dementia. For example, Assisi Hospice's new development, which is supported by MOH, will have a dedicated inpatient hospice ward for persons with advanced dementia. Dover Park Hospice and Tan Tock Seng Hospital have piloted a new dedicated home palliative care service called "Programme Dignity" for persons with dementia. We will continue to expand these services to meet the increasing need in the future.

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COST INCREASE TO EMPLOYERS FOR MANDATORY CORPORATE MEDICAL INSURANCE

51 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for Health what is the estimated cost increase to employers and the impact on the Budget (as a result of associated tax benefits) involved in making portable corporate medical insurance mandatory.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: With MediShield Life implemented in November 2015, all Singaporeans now have portable medical insurance. MediShield Life is a basic health insurance scheme that covers all Singaporeans and for all pre-existing illnesses, regardless of any change of employment status or employer. It provides sufficient coverage for subsidised treatment in public hospitals.

Today, many employers also extend medical benefits to their employees voluntarily as part of their employment contracts. MOM and tripartite partners encourage employers to structure these benefits on a portable basis and the Government provides incentives for employers to do so, by offering higher tax deductions for medical expenses of up to 2% of total employees' remuneration.

Portable medical benefits can take different forms, such as additional contributions to the employee's Medisave account, which the employee can use for his healthcare expenses or insurance premiums for MediShield Life or Integrated Shield Plans even if he changes his job. Alternatively, employers may choose to pay for their employees' health insurance premiums directly.

MediShield Life is the mandatory, portable health insurance for all Singaporeans, covering them at all stages of life. Employers are already required to make mandatory contributions to their employees' Medisave to help pay for the premiums of MediShield Life. MOH's focus will be to ensure that MediShield Life continues to meet the needs of Singaporeans.

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TRANSPARENCY IN CRITERIA FOR OBTAINING PERMANENT RESIDENCY AND CITIZENSHIP

52 Ms Kuik Shiao-Yin asked the Minister for Home Affairs (a) what are the policy reasons for keeping the criteria for obtaining permanent residency and citizenship opaque and whether there are plans to make them more transparent over time; and (b) what are the circumstantial reasons that justify qualifying a child (under the age of 21) for PR or citizenship while his foreign-born parent, especially those who are the child's single care-giver, is denied similar recognition.

Mr K Shanmugam: Each application for Permanent Residency (PR) and Singapore Citizenship (SC) is evaluated holistically on a range of criteria, including economic contributions, education qualifications, family profile and length of stay in Singapore. The objective is to assess how committed the applicant is to sink roots here, and how well the applicant is able to contribute and integrate into our society.

However, we do not reveal the detailed criteria for granting PR and SC as it is not in our interest to do so. Revealing the detailed criteria would, among other things, create sensitivities in their countries of origin.

For child applicants, there may be instances where a child is granted SC but not the foreign parent. For example, a child born to a foreign parent who is legally married to an SC at the time of his birth would be entitled to the grant of SC under our Constitution.

However, the foreign parent is not entitled to SC in the same manner and would need to

meet prevailing criteria to qualify for PR or SC. In such cases, we would not deny the child the grant of SC, even if his foreign parent does not yet meet the prevailing criteria for PR or SC.

Foreign spouses who do not qualify for PR or SC may be granted a Long-Term Visit Pass (LTVP) or Long-Term Visit Pass-Plus (LTVP+) for them to remain in Singapore with their families. For foreign parents who are widowed or divorced and have sole custody of young SC children, we would generally facilitate their continued stay in Singapore through a renewable LTVP or LTVP+, to allow them to care for their children here.

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PROCESS FOR STATELESS IN SINGAPORE TO BE RECOGNISED AS PERMANENT RESIDENTS OR CITIZENS

53 Ms **Kuik Shiao-Yin** asked the Minister for Home Affairs (a) what are the requirements that the stateless need to meet to be recognised as PRs and citizens; (b) whether the stateless can count on having citizen relatives as a positive factor in their applications; and (c) what is the Ministry's advice for stateless parents who have failed multiple times at getting PR or citizenship for themselves but are now seeking a solution for their Singapore-born children not to be labelled stateless as well.

Mr K Shanmugam: Each application for Permanent Residency (PR) and Singapore Citizenship (SC), including those submitted by stateless individuals, is evaluated on a range of criteria, including economic contributions, education qualifications, family profile and length of stay in Singapore. The person must be able to make a positive contribution to the country, as a citizen. The fact that there are SC family members, for example, an SC spouse or child, would be a plus factor in the evaluation. The circumstances in which the person became stateless may also be relevant. People may, for example, have chosen to give up their foreign citizenship, or may not have acquired foreign citizenship because of the actions/inactions of their parents. There are also some who are stateless, by reason of not applying for citizenship in Singapore previously. The different circumstances will have to be considered and not everyone who is stateless, and in Singapore, can be treated in the same way.

As of end August 2016, around 82% of the stateless persons in Singapore have become PRs, and enjoy the various benefits such as healthcare, housing and education that are accorded to PRs. These stateless PRs can also acquire SC if they meet the necessary requirements.

A child born in Singapore to a stateless parent may be eligible for Singapore Citizenship at birth. This can happen if his other parent is a Singapore Citizen, and the parents are legally married to each other at the time of his birth.

A child born in Singapore to a stateless parent may also obtain foreign citizenship. This can happen if the child's other parent holds foreign citizenship, and manages to obtain foreign citizenship for his child through his home country. However, if the foreign parent chooses not to apply for, or fails to acquire, such foreign citizenship for the child through his home country, then the child will become stateless.

A child born in Singapore will become stateless if neither of his parents are Singapore citizens or citizens of another country.

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REGULATION OF ONLINE PROVIDERS OF LEGAL AID

54 **Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan** asked the Minister for Law what is being done to effectively monitor and regulate online providers of legal aid, templates and advice and to ensure that the companies/businesses/legal practitioners providing such an online service are duly qualified and properly regulated by the legal profession and in conformity with the regulations.

Mr K Shanmugam: The practice of law in Singapore is subject to licensing and regulatory requirements under the Legal Profession Act, whether the legal services are provided online or otherwise.

Section 33 of the Legal Profession Act sets out the services that can only be provided by persons who are duly qualified and authorised to practise law in Singapore. A person who breaches this provision is liable to be prosecuted for an offence.

At present, there are a wide variety of products and services offered online to assist those with legal needs. Some, though not necessarily all, of what is offered may constitute legal services regulated under the Legal Profession Act. Each provider has its own service model, and some of these online providers may not even be physically based in Singapore, even though their products and services may be accessible from Singapore.

It is not practical for the Ministry to pro-actively seek out and monitor each and every website that purports to offer assistance to those with legal needs for compliance with the Legal Profession Act.

Members of the public may visit the Legal Services Regulatory Authority's portal on the Ministry of Law's website to check if the service provider is a licensed law practice. If a member of the public is of the view that there has been a breach of the regulatory requirements, he or she can file a complaint with the police, which can then look into the matter.

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EMPLOYERS' OBLIGATIONS TO OFFER INSURANCE AND MEDICAL COVERAGE FOR FEMALE EMPLOYEES IN RESPONSE TO ZIKA VIRUS THREAT

55 Ms **K Thanaletchimi** asked the Minister for Manpower given the global nature of businesses and the Zika virus threat, whether the Government finds it necessary to raise awareness of employers' obligations and enable them to put in place response measures such as medical coverage, paid leave and insurance for the protection of female employees.

Mr Lim Swee Say: The global nature of some businesses today may require more frequent travel, resulting in employees being more exposed to external health risks, such as the Zika virus. To raise employers' awareness about their obligations with regard to these health risks, we have issued advisories in the past for the pandemic influenza H1N1 and MERS-CoV to help employers take appropriate measures.

These advisories covered employers' obligations in three broad areas. First, pre-travel. Employers should regularly check the Ministry of Health's website for the latest updates on affected countries, and take reference from advisories issued by MOH when deciding on business travel plans.

Second, if travel to affected countries is unavoidable, employers should advise employees to take the necessary precautions as per MOH's advisories.

Third, if employees are found to be infected upon return, employers are required to provide them paid sick leave in accordance with the Employment Act, and extend appropriate medical coverage and insurance, as stipulated under their employment contracts or collective agreements.

These obligations for post-travel also apply for local transmission of Zika. MOM recently issued advisories to employers and dormitory operators on measures to limit the spread of the Zika virus. They provide guidance for managing pregnant employees and employees suspected

of infection. MOM is also working closely with relevant agencies to step up checks on worksites and dormitories.

Everyone - workers, employers and dormitory operators - has to play his part to help minimise local transmission of Zika.

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BOGUS JOBS FOR WORK PASS APPLICATIONS

56 **Ms K Thanaletchimi** asked the Minister for Manpower (a) what stringent measures are in place to prevent attempts by groups to use bogus jobs to trick the authorities into approving work permits/passes to foreign workers; (b) what enforcement measures are in place to ensure that employers do not harbour illegal workers; and (c) whether the current penalties are adequate to deter unscrupulous employers from committing such offences of harbouring illegal workers.

Mr Lim Swee Say: It is against the law for employers to bring in foreign workers without the intention to employ them and allowing these workers to find their own employment. It is also illegal for other employers to hire foreign workers who are released by their official employers to find their own work. MOM takes a serious view of such offences and has put in measures to address both the supply and demand sides.

On the supply side, MOM has taken steps to detect fraudulent applications upstream and proactively enforce downstream. We pick out dubious companies and subject them to additional checks when they put in work pass applications. Downstream, MOM carries out proactive enforcement operations against suspected syndicates which are detected through our intel capabilities. The recent island-wide enforcement operation that MOM conducted in July is an example of our continuous efforts to take down syndicates that bring in foreign workers for illegal employment.

On the demand side, MOM deters the demand for illegal workers through education and taking errant employers to task. MOM issues reminders to main contractors that they have an obligation under the law to ensure that all foreign workers, including those of their sub-contractors, at their worksites have valid work passes showing the right employers. The reminders also emphasise that non-compliance would be dealt with severely. Those who disregard the law are taken to task.

The penalties for bringing in illegal workers have been stepped up for greater deterrence.

With the amendment of the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (EFMA) in November 2012, those who operate shell companies and import labour illegally face imprisonment between six months and two years, and a fine up to \$6,000 per charge. For severe cases, the offender is also liable to be caned. In July this year, a Singaporean man was sentenced to 40 months in jail for his role in setting up two shell companies and obtaining work passes for 46 foreigners without the intention to employ them. In addition, employers who hire illegal foreign workers face a fine of between \$5,000 and \$30,000 or up to 12 months' imprisonment or both. Offenders will also be debarred from hiring foreign workers.

MOM will continue to take a holistic approach to deal with persons and syndicates who perpetuate the illegal importation of labour. We will not hesitate to take offenders to task.

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RECONSTRUCTION OF APRON DRAINS AND UNEVEN VOID DECK FLOORS IN NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL PROGRAMME

57 **Mr Pritam Singh** asked the Minister for National Development whether HDB will include the option to reconstruct apron drains and rescreed void decks under block-related works for Town Councils in its Neighbourhood Renewal Programme (NRP) manual.

Mr Lawrence Wong: Since September 2014, the scope of the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme has been expanded to include additional works such as repainting and various repair works. The repair works include the reconstruction of apron drains and the rescreeding of void decks. The expanded scope is applicable to projects selected from FY2015 onwards.

HDB had informed all Town Councils of the expanded scope in September 2014.

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RATIONALE BEHIND POLICY OF NOT RECOGNISING CHILDREN OF UNWED MOTHERS AS LEGITIMATE CHILDREN

59 **Ms Kuik Shiao-Yin** asked ask the Minister for Social and Family Development (a) what are the past and present reasons underpinning the policy of not recognising children of unwed mothers as legitimate children; (b) what are the best avenues of assistance for single unwed mothers who wish to adopt their own child to make them legitimate but struggle to afford the legal fees to do so; and (c) how does the Ministry protect the welfare of minors whose single

unwed mother died without a will and their status of illegitimacy denies them a share of their mother's assets.

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin: The family is the basic building block of our society. Strong marriages are the key to strong families, and parenthood within marriage is the desired and prevailing social norm. Hence, benefits such as the Baby Bonus cash gift, housing benefits and tax reliefs are provided to families with legitimate children, to encourage births within marriages. Other benefits that support the growth and development of children are given to all children. These include the recently extended Child Development Account (CDA) benefits, as well as education and healthcare subsidies, the Medisave grant for newborns, infant care and childcare subsidies and the foreign domestic worker levy concession.

Those who have difficulty affording legal fees (including unwed mothers who wish to adopt their own child) may approach the Legal Aid Bureau for assistance. Applicants will have to satisfy a means test and a merits test to qualify for legal aid.

Every situation involving an illegitimate child is different. The Government thus considers each case that it comes across, before deciding the appropriate course of action to take. For instance, illegitimate children can inherit their mother's estate if their mother dies without a will, and has no surviving legitimate children. They may also have other family or social support. These are scenarios where the individual would not need Government support. For children who are vulnerable, MSF's Social Service Offices will assess their needs, provide financial assistance and coordinate support with other social service agencies, where necessary. If there is clearly no next of kin and the safety of the minor (aged 16 and below) is compromised, my Ministry can apply for a court order to place the minor in an alternative environment.

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PUBLICATION OF SMRT'S FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AFTER TAKE-OVER BY TEMASEK HOLDINGS

62 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for Transport whether SMRT will continue to publish detailed financial and operating information when it becomes wholly owned by Temasek Holdings.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: In accordance with the Companies Act, SMRT will be required to

file its annual audited financial statements with the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority (ACRA). Members of the public can obtain the information from ACRA.

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SENSORS IN BUSES TO PREVENT ELDERLY FROM FALLING

63 **Ms Joan Pereira** asked the Minister for Transport if the Ministry will consider requiring all buses to be fitted with intelligent sensors to assist bus drivers when approaching curbs at bus stops as a measure to prevent the elderly from falling between the bus door and curb, especially when alighting.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: Bus captains are trained to pull up to within half a metre from the kerb at bus stops, and to ensure commuters have alighted safely before moving off. To help them to do so, LTA is studying the feasibility of sensors that can detect the kerb and objects around the bus.

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DECISION NOT TO HOLD STATE FUNERAL FOR LATE FORMER PRESIDENT ONG TENG CHEONG

64 **Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong** asked the Prime Minister (a) whether the Cabinet offered the family of the late former President Ong Teng Cheong the choice to hold a state funeral; (b) if so, what was the decision of Mr Ong's family when offered; (c) if not, what were the considerations by the Cabinet in deciding not to offer a State Funeral to Mr Ong's family; and (d) whether the Government will consider honouring all past presidents with a State Funeral when they pass on.

Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien (for the Prime Minister): This issue has been raised before and the Government has explained its position publicly.

It is right and fitting that when Singaporeans who have made major contributions to the country pass away, they are honoured and mourned by the nation. The decision of how to honour the person, including whether to hold a State Funeral, is made by the Government of the day after consulting the family. The appropriate way to do so will vary with each individual. It is not feasible to set a formula as to who should receive a state funeral, simply based on the person's

rank or appointment held.

When Mr Ong Teng Cheong passed away in 2002, the then Cabinet arranged a State-Assisted funeral for Mr Ong after consulting with his family. This included the following: The state flag was flown at half-mast on all Government buildings on 11 February 2002; the SAF and Police provided the Coffin Bearer party; vigil guards were deployed as a mark of respect; there was an escort band for the funeral march; the SAF helped to organise the family wake and crematorium service, and the Police assisted in crowd and traffic control.

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SUBSIDY FOR MATERNITY AND DELIVERY SERVICES AT RESTRUCTURED HOSPITALS FOR NON-SINGAPOREAN WOMEN

66 **Assoc Prof Daniel Goh Pei Siong** asked the Minister for Health other than women who are permanent residents or hold Long-Term Visit Pass-Plus passes, whether pregnant non-Singaporean women whose child will become a Singaporean citizen at birth should benefit from Government subsidies for maternity and delivery services at restructured hospitals.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents receive government subsidies at public healthcare institutions, with citizens receiving a higher level of subsidies. This is in line with the larger Government policy of differentiating social benefits and subsidies by citizenship status.

Patients are extended healthcare subsidies based on their citizenship status, and not that of their children. This principle applies to all healthcare services, including maternity and delivery services. For newborns who are Singaporeans, they are eligible for healthcare subsidies and other benefits such as the Medisave Grant for Newborns and the Government's contribution to the Child Development Account.

We understand that some Singapore Citizens with non-citizen spouses and some Singaporean children with non-citizen parents may require additional support. This feedback has also been raised by other Members previously. Since 2012, MOH has extended inpatient subsidies to non-citizen spouses who are on Long-Term Visit Pass-Plus.

We have to take into account the policy objective of differentiating social benefits and subsidies by citizenship, to give greater support to Singapore Citizens. We also need to be mindful that the cost of giving more government subsidies will ultimately be borne by all

Singaporeans. Hence, any proposal to further extend more Government subsidies to foreigners, who are neither Permanent Residents nor Long-Term Visit Pass-Plus holders, would need to be carefully considered.

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REVIEW OF CPF INVESTMENT SCHEME GIVEN CONTINUED LOSSES

67 **Ms Foo Mee Har** asked the Minister for Manpower whether the Ministry will consider reviewing the CPF Investment Scheme (CPFIS) urgently given that 38% of investors have suffered losses through CPFIS and only 16% of investors in the scheme managed to achieve better than the 2.5% interest rate they would have otherwise earned by leaving their money in the CPF Ordinary Account.

Mr Lim Swee Say: The CPF Investment Scheme, or the CPFIS for short, was introduced in 1986 to give CPF members an option to invest and manage their CPF savings. CPF members are made aware that they must understand and accept the risk of their investment choices. There are over 700 products to choose from under CPFIS. They should therefore choose CPFIS investments that match their risk tolerance and investment objectives. There is now \$24 billion invested through the CPFIS, of which the majority are from the Ordinary Account.

In the past five financial years, about 16% of the CPFIS-OA investors were able to realise higher returns than the risk free OA interest rate offered by CPF. However, the other 84% of CPFIS-OA investors did not. In other words, the majority of CPFIS-OA investors would have been better off leaving their savings in their OA to earn the default interest rate, currently at 2.5%. The CPF Advisory Panel made a similar observation in its report that was released in August 2016. Hence, the Panel has recommended that the Government review the current CPFIS to better target it at knowledgeable CPFIS investors who feel confident of managing their investments on their own and have the time to do so. Along with the review of the CPFIS, the Panel also recommended that the Government introduce the Lifetime Retirement Investment Scheme, or the LRIS for short, as a simpler investment option. The LRIS will cater to CPF members who wish to invest their CPF savings, but find the CPFIS too complex and onerous or find it too time-consuming to actively manage their investments.

The Government has accepted the Panel's recommendation to review the CPFIS and to study the LRIS. More details will be released later.

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STRENGTHENING SINGAPOREAN CORE IN 'TRIPLE WEAK' COMPANIES

68 **Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan** asked the Minister for Manpower whether he can provide an update on the Ministry's drive and enforcement in strengthening the Singaporean core including the scrutiny of triple weak companies.

Mr Lim Swee Say: We are taking a two-pronged approach to encourage firms to strengthen their Singaporean core.

First, in February 2016, the Ministry identified about 100 firms for closer scrutiny. These firms did not seem to have made reasonable efforts to provide fair employment opportunities or have had substantiated complaints of discriminatory practices.

After notifying them and scrutinising them for about six months, about one in five have been assessed by TAFEP and sector agencies to have made significant improvements. Their employment practices are now comparable to their industry peers. They have taken pro-active steps to participate in career fairs and training programmes organised by WDA and e2i. Some have taken the further step to develop in-house programmes for knowledge transfer to Singaporean staff. At the recommendation of TAFEP, MOM no longer subjects these firms to closer scrutiny and their EP applications are being processed as per normal.

The remaining four in five have shown some progress but MOM will continue to scrutinise their EP applications. As at end September, we have not approved close to 300 EP applications from these firms. We are looking closely at whether they have taken concrete steps to consider Singaporeans fairly for these positions.

In addition, we have identified around 180 more firms to be placed on closer scrutiny. This will bring the total firms under closer scrutiny to about 250.

Second, we are identifying firms with exemplary fair and progressive human capital practices for differentiated treatment. MOM is launching a Human Capital Partnership Programme to better support them in nurturing our local manpower and strengthening the complementarity of foreign manpower. This will encourage more firms to follow suit. We are in the process of shortlisting the first batch of these firms, working out the details of further support, and aim to launch the programme later this year.

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SOLAR PANELS FOR HDB FLATS UNDER SOLARNOVA TENDER

69 **Mr Pritam Singh** asked the Minister for National Development (a) to date, how many HDB blocks under the purview of each Town Council have been selected to be outfitted with solar panels on their rooftops; and (b) how many HDB blocks have been shortlisted for the latest SolarNova tender scheduled for the first half of 2016 and under which Town Councils do these blocks come from.

Mr Lawrence Wong: HDB has assessed that there are around 6,000 HDB blocks islandwide which are suitable for solar panels, spread out amongst all Town Councils. This is based on the roof design, roof space availability and solar irradiance potential of the blocks. HDB intends to install solar panels for all these blocks progressively under the SolarNova programme.

To date, about 1,800 blocks have been selected, where the solar panels have either been installed or are currently undergoing installation. They are located across all Town Councils (TC), including Aljunied-Hougang TC. For the upcoming SolarNova tender in 2016, HDB has selected 600 blocks in Ang Mo Kio and Marsiling-Yew Tee Town Councils.

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REVIEW OF GRANT AMOUNT TO TOWN COUNCIL GIVEN ADDITIONAL MAINTENANCE CYCLES

70 **Mr Zainal Sapari** asked the Minister for National Development whether the Ministry can increase the grant allocated to Town Councils given the additional items or amenities required for cyclical maintenance using the Sinking Fund.

Mr Lawrence Wong: Town Councils fund their operations, including cyclical maintenance and replacement works, primarily through the Service and Conservancy Charges (S&CC) they collect from residents. This is supplemented by an annual operating grant from MND, of about \$98 million a year.

Town Councils should manage their finances carefully and take appropriate measures to ensure that they have sufficient funds to carry out their statutory responsibilities. This could include putting aside a higher proportion of their S&CC collections and grants-in-aid, beyond the

stipulated minimum, in their Sinking Funds. They could also manage expenditures more tightly, and increase S&CC rates, where necessary.

MND has been studying ways to help Town Councils ensure their long-term financial sustainability. As announced in September 2016, MND intends to raise the minimum contribution rate into the Sinking Funds, and to require Town Councils to set aside more funds for future lift replacements through a new Lift Replacement Fund. The new Lift Enhancement Programme (LEP), estimated at \$450 million over the next 10 years, will also give Town Councils significant help by co-funding about 90% of their lift modernisation costs. This is on top of the existing Lift Upgrading Programme and Selective Lift Replacement Programme, which assist Town Councils with the replacement of their lifts.

Notwithstanding these measures, all Town Councils are ultimately responsible for the cyclical maintenance and replacement works in their estates. Town Councils must therefore continue to take a long-term view of their finances and plan ahead for their future expenditures.

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NUMBER AND LENGTH OF STAY AT CRISIS SHELTERS FOR ABUSED WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN

71 **Mr Saktiandi Supaat** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development (a) for the past three years, what is the number of cases of abused women and their children who have sought help from the Ministry for temporary shelter; (b) on average, how long did they stay at these shelters; and (c) whether there is a need for more shelters to be set up.

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin: Family Service Centres and Family Violence Specialist Centres assist family violence victims so that they can remain safely with their families and friends. Where necessary, referrals are made to crisis shelters for temporary accommodation.

Over the last three years, an average of 240 abused women and their children sought refuge each year at the four crisis shelters my Ministry funds. Their average length of stay was four months.

As the shelters have sufficient capacity, there are currently no plans to set up more shelters. We will continue to monitor the adequacy of our services.

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PREVALENCE OF CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES PER

COHORT

72 **Ms Sun Xueling** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development what is the percentage of children in a cohort who suffer from learning disabilities and whether there are programmes which the Ministry supports at a pre-school level to encourage children with learning disabilities to learn through play and interaction.

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin: My Ministry works closely with KKH and NUH in the Child Development Programme to detect developmental delays in young children at the pre-school stage. While general developmental delays can be detected earlier, learning disabilities typically become clearer at a later stage in children, closer to the school-going age.

At a young age, children develop and learn at very different paces. A child's development can also be impacted by environmental factors such as exposure and teaching styles. The pre-school years are too early to make a definite diagnosis for learning disabilities. Learning difficulties are diagnosed conclusively at a later stage; closer to school-going age than at the pre-school stage. About 5% of our student population have been diagnosed with special educational needs.

Pre-school children, aged 5 and 6, with mild developmental delays or learning needs are supported by the Developmental Support Programme (DSP). DSP is currently offered in some 300 pre-school centres and have catered to more than 2,000 children since its inception in 2013. Children on the DSP are given the necessary support to level up their developmental domains for school readiness. The programme also enables these children to benefit from a mainstream and inclusive learning environment. With early intervention through the DSP, the child will develop the competencies he or she requires for Primary 1.

Children with more severe developmental needs are supported through the Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC) which is currently available at 17 EIPIC centres across the island.

The Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) is working with training institutes to equip pre-school teachers with the necessary skills to support children with learning and developmental needs. Learning through play and interaction with children are key concepts in the early childhood pedagogy. Many of the training for pre-school teachers have embedded techniques on play and interaction in the training programmes. In-service pre-school teachers can

also tap on the subsidised Continuing Professional Development courses, such as the Specialist Diploma in Early Childhood Learning Support (SDELS), to enhance their skills in supporting children with developmental needs.

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PROGRESS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SILVER ZONES

73 **Mr Desmond Choo** asked the Minister for Transport (a) what is the progress of the implementation of the Silver Zones; (b) how has the Ministry sought to seek support from motorists; and (c) whether it has reduced the number of traffic incidents among vulnerable residents such as children and the elderly.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: As of end-August 2016, eight Silver Zones have been completed, out of the 50 that are planned by 2023. The next Silver Zone that will be completed at the end of this month is in Hougang.

Silver Zones are implemented with the support of the community. Prior to implementation, LTA distributes flyers and notices to residents, conducts site walks with grassroots leaders, and erects banners and electronic signs to inform motorists of the impending changes. After completion, LTA continues to gather feedback from residents and monitors the traffic situation. There is strong support for the Silver Zone programme, even amongst motorists.

This is not surprising because Silver Zones have been tremendously successful in reducing traffic accidents. For the eight locations where there are now Silver Zones, there were 48 accidents involving children and the elderly in the five-year period preceding implementation. Since the Silver Zones were implemented, the first zone two years ago, there has only been one such accident.

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FALL-PROOF COVERED GRATINGS ALONG PEDESTRIAN WALKWAYS

74 **Ms Joan Pereira** asked the Minister for Transport whether the Ministry will consider replacing covered metal gratings with smooth surfaces along pedestrian walkways with those that have more friction so as to reduce the number of slips and falls especially among the elderly.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: The Land Transport Authority has been implementing anti-slip

coating on metal gratings at locations which the elderly and the young frequent, such as hospitals, Silver Zones and schools, and where the chances of slipping are higher, such as steep footpaths. We will progressively implement anti-slip coating at more locations.

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FOREIGN DOMESTIC HELPERS ABUSE

75 **Mr Kok Heng Leun** asked the Minister for Manpower for each year from 2014 to 2015 (a) what is the number of foreign domestic helpers who have been (i) abused during employment and (ii) abusing the people they are caring for respectively; and (b) of these, what is the number of helpers who have no day-off monthly or only one/two-days off monthly.

Mr Lim Swee Say: For abuse cases involving foreign domestic workers (FDWs), Police investigate all cases where criminal offences have been reported, whether FDWs are victims or offenders. In 2014 and 2015, there were about 30 cases per year involving FDWs as victims, where after investigations, the employer or members of employer's household were prosecuted or given warnings in lieu of prosecution. In the same period, about 40 FDWs per year were arrested by the Police, on suspicion of abusing their wards. A proportion of these arrest cases eventually resulted in prosecution or warning in lieu of prosecution. MOM does not track the number of rest days received by the FDW offenders.

All employers are expected to treat FDWs with care and respect. Under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Regulations, an employer has to grant a weekly rest day to the FDW or compensate the FDW in lieu of the rest day if there is mutual agreement. FDWs who encounter difficulties can seek assistance through the MOM helpline and NGOs like the Centre for Domestic Employees (CDE).

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FOREIGNERS CAUGHT WORKING ILLEGALLY IN SINGAPORE

76 **Mr Chong Kee Hiong** asked the Minister for Manpower (a) in the last three years, how many foreigners have been caught for working illegally in Singapore; (b) what are the top three nationalities; (c) what are the top three sectors and occupations they are engaged in; and (d) what measures are being taken to reduce their numbers.

Mr Lim Swee Say: Between 2014 to August 2016, around 3,000 foreigners were found working illegally, and they are mostly from China, Bangladesh and India. We have seen a steady decline in the number of foreigners found to be working illegally, from around 1,300 in 2014 to 550 in the first eight months of this year.

The illegal workers were found working mainly in the construction, food and beverage and other services sectors, in occupations such as construction workers, cleaners and stall assistants.

All foreigners working in Singapore must have a valid work pass. Failing to do so is a breach of the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act. MOM has a multi-prong strategy to reduce such illegal employment.

First, MOM educates work pass holders and employers on their employment responsibilities, as well as the consequences of not complying with our laws. These messages are reinforced in MOM's advisory letter to employers, guidebooks, newsletters, and roadshows for foreign workers, including at their dormitories and in their native languages.

Second, we take a risk-based approach and conduct pro-active inspections on businesses suspected of hiring foreigners illegally. In addition, we also respond to tip-offs from members of the public. Foreigners found working illegally will be barred from future employment in Singapore.

Third, to deter the demand for illegal workers, the penalty for illegal employment was enhanced in 2012. Employers who hire illegal workers face a minimum fine of \$5,000 per charge for first-time offenders. Repeat offenders face a minimum fine of \$10,000 per charge and a minimum imprisonment term of one month.

Our strategy of conducting inspections, imposing penalties and outreach has worked well.

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RATIONALE FOR STAFF DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS BEFORE CONCLUSION OF CORONER'S INQUIRY FOR 22 MARCH FATAL TRAIN INCIDENT

79 **Mr Yee Chia Hsing** asked the Minister for Transport with regard to the MRT train incident on 22 March 2016, whether it is premature for SMRT to take disciplinary action against staff before the conclusion of investigations and the coroner's inquiry.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: It is SMRT's prerogative to take disciplinary action against its staff in accordance with its established procedures. However, as the Member has pointed out,

investigations by the Land Transport Authority, the Ministry of Manpower and Police are still on-going. An argument can therefore be made that in this case it would have been better to wait till these investigations come to some conclusions. I note that NTWU has lodged an appeal on behalf of the two staff, and SMRT has convened an Appeal Panel to review the case. I am sure that the Panel will give full consideration to all the relevant factors, and reach a fair decision.

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GROUNDINGS FOR DISMISSAL OF SMRT EMPLOYEES FOR 22 MARCH FATAL TRAIN INCIDENT

81 **Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap** asked the Minister for Manpower (a) whether the Ministry has asked SMRT for the full grounds for dismissal of the two employees who have been sacked over the fatal accident on 22 March 2016 near Pasir Ris MRT station; and (b) if so, what were these grounds.

Mr Lim Swee Say: On 22 March 2016, two SMRT trainees were hit and killed by an oncoming train near Pasir Ris MRT station. On 13 September, SMRT dismissed two employees who were involved in the accident - one of the employees was the train driver, and the other was an Assistant Engineer.

The National Transport Workers' Union (NTWU) filed an appeal to SMRT on 19 September. In response, the company convened a panel to review the appeal. On 27 September, NTWU also filed an appeal to MOM under the Industrial Relations Act (IRA), on behalf of the two union members.

MOM has called for information on the grounds of dismissal from SMRT. We will try to help the parties involved to come to an amicable settlement through conciliation. If it fails, an inquiry will be conducted to determine if the company has just cause to dismiss the workers. In the meantime, the union is engaging the two workers and is helping to secure employment for them.

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EDUCATION ON WILDLIFE TREATMENT FOR RESIDENTS OF NATURE-INSPIRED DEVELOPMENTS

83 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for National Development whether the

Ministry will consider making it mandatory to educate prospective or current residents of "nature-inspired" developments on the appropriate response to wildlife sighted in their areas and why members of the public should not feed wildlife.

Mr Lawrence Wong: It is important to carefully manage human-wildlife interactions. In this regard, agencies like NParks and AVA are already taking active measures to do so.

First, NParks organizes biodiversity programmes like the Festival of Biodiversity and Community in Nature initiatives. Taken as a whole, these programmes help to generate public awareness of, and appreciation for, our native wildlife.

Second, agencies disseminate guidelines on how residents can minimise potential human-wildlife conflict, particularly in residential districts close to nature areas. For example, the guidelines touch on proper methods of securing trash bins and keeping food out of sight. Moreover, AVA officers conduct walkabouts in areas where residents have faced issues relating to animal nuisance. AVA officers also attend meetings to address residents' concerns in these areas.

Third, NParks conducts specific outreach activities to discourage animal feeding. These include distributing advisory pamphlets to residents, conducting workshops for school children, and displaying prominent signage against wildlife feeding in parks and nature reserves.

That said, there will always be a small minority who persist in inappropriate behaviours like feeding. In these cases, a more targeted approach which may include official warnings or enforcement action is necessary.

Most residents who live close to nature areas behave very responsibly, have made adjustments, and appreciate the wildlife as part of their living environment. The Government will continue with its efforts to engage the broader community in public education initiatives, and to work constructively to address problems related to wildlife that might arise. With tolerance, understanding, and a spirit of compromise, most human-wildlife issues can be resolved.

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BENEFITS OF NOISE BARRIERS ALONG MRT TRACKS

84 **Ms Tin Pei Ling** asked the Minister for Transport (a) whether the intended benefit of noise barriers that are constructed along MRT tracks has been achieved; (b) whether the Ministry will consider covering more areas in which residents' quality of life has been adversely affected;

and (c) whether the qualifying threshold can be lowered to less than 67dBA.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: The noise barriers installed along MRT tracks have reduced the noise level from passing trains by around five decibels.

However, the installation of noise barriers incurs resources and takes up precious engineering hours that are needed for maintenance and improvement works. LTA is therefore focusing its attention on residential areas where the noise level exceeds NEA's recommended threshold of 67 decibels averaged over an hour.

LTA is also working with train manufacturers and operators to mitigate noise in other ways. These include fitting trains with noise-dampening wheels; using ballast and concrete sleepers on the elevated tracks, which are better able to absorb vibration and noise compared to the concrete slab track used in the underground tunnels; and servicing train wheels and tracks even more frequently.

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PLANS TO AUGMENT LTA'S CAPABILITIES GIVEN EXPANDED ROLES

85 **Mr Zaqy Mohamad** asked the Minister for Transport (a) what are the plans to augment LTA's capabilities due to its expanded role covering the new bus contracting model, new rail financing framework and the future Singapore-Malaysia high-speed rail; (b) whether there are plans to restructure LTA to better execute its role as a regulator, asset owner and industry developer; and (c) what new capabilities will be put in place to ensure better governance and service delivery of the rail and bus services under the new structure.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: The new public bus and rail financing models, and the future Singapore-KL High Speed Rail, will indeed require new resources and capabilities on the part of the Land Transport Authority.

LTA has increased its headcount steadily since 2013 by about 35%. This growth was largely in engineering and asset management. In the next two years, LTA will add another 900 new engineering positions.

Second, LTA has been tapping the experiences of other jurisdictions. Amongst others, it has been studying the public transport tendering and contract management approaches used in the UK, Sweden, Australia and Germany. It has been in discussions with and conducted visits to

the Hong Kong Mass Transit Railway, Taipei Metro and London Underground to understand their asset management and maintenance processes. LTA has also established platforms such as the Rail Excellence Advisory Panel and the High Speed Rail International Advisory Panel, so as to be able to discuss the issues directly with experienced practitioners who have faced similar challenges in their work abroad.

Third, LTA has undergone reorganisation to be able to better deliver on its expanded mandate. Four new specialist teams have been formed: a rail asset management team, a bus asset management team, a bus service tendering and contract team, and a High Speed Rail group. As the projects progress, in particular as and when there is further agreement with Malaysia on the High Speed Rail, LTA will further restructure and reorganise itself as needed.

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INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR PRIVATE-HIRE VEHICLES AND DRIVERS

86 **Mr Zaqy Mohamad** asked the Minister for Transport what measures are in place to ensure that private-hire car drivers including Uber drivers have adequate insurance coverage to cover injuries and damage to passengers, road users and private property.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: The Motor Vehicles (Third-Party Risks and Compensation) Act requires all motor vehicles, including private hire cars, to be insured against third-party liability risks. These include death or bodily injury to passengers and other road users. In addition, private hire cars are required to procure insurance that covers the use of the vehicle for hire and reward purposes, which is more than the basic coverage of third-party liability risks required of vehicles in general. This means that passengers in a private hire car who are involved in a motor accident can claim compensation from the owner of the private hire car or its insurer.

It is an offence to use or permit a person to use a vehicle without the appropriate insurance. Those convicted are liable to a fine not exceeding \$1,000, or imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months, or both. The driver will also be disqualified from holding or obtaining a driving licence for 12 months from the date of conviction.

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RATIONALE FOR CURRENT COE VALIDITY PERIOD

87 **Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap** asked the Minister for Transport (a) what is

the reason for the Certificate of Entitlement (COE) renewal period to be fixed at five years and ten years; and (b) whether the Ministry will allow flexibility for vehicle owners, in particular motorcycle owners, to choose the period of renewal of their choice.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: The validity period of COEs, whether first time COEs or renewal COEs, was originally set at 10 years.

However, in response to appeals from vehicle owners, including motorcycle owners, whose COEs are expiring but feel that their vehicles might not last beyond another five years, we changed the policy in 1992 to allow them to renew their COEs for five years, as a concession. The vehicles must then be deregistered at the end of the five years. If, however, the vehicle is deregistered before five years, the amount paid for the remaining COE validity period will be refunded. In that sense, the vehicle owner already has some flexibility to keep the vehicle for less than five years.

Allowing vehicle owners to renew their COEs for any number of years they choose favours, in effect, existing vehicle owners over those who wish to buy a new vehicle. We have to strike a fair balance between the two groups, and therefore are not inclined to extend such a concession to existing vehicle owners. Such a move could also give rise to more uncertainty over the supply and demand of COEs, and introduce more volatility into the prices, compared to the current situation where the validity period is fixed at five or ten years.

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PENALTY FOR DISLODGED AIR-CONDITIONING UNITS

88 **Mr Gan Thiam Poh** asked the Minister for National Development (a) in the last five years, how many home owners have been prosecuted or penalised for their air-conditioners falling off from their flats due to improper maintenance; and (b) whether the current measures to protect a person's safety from falling air-conditioners is sufficient.

Mr Lawrence Wong: There have been three cases in the past five years where air-conditioners became dislodged and fell. As homeowners are responsible for the maintenance of their air-conditioning units and their accompanying installations, the homeowners in these cases were issued composition fines under the Building Maintenance and Strata Management Act (BMSMA).

Under the BMSMA, BCA can issue a Notice to homeowners to carry out improvement works to their air-conditioning units, should there be evidence of disrepair. This includes installations like the metal brackets holding the air-conditioning units in place. The Act also allows for errant homeowners to be issued composition fines or prosecuted.

To reduce the risk of incidents, new buildings are designed with concrete ledges or steel casings to hold the air-conditioning units. In addition, the installation of air-conditioning units on the building exterior can only be performed by trained installers. This is to ensure that the work complies with safety requirements and that it is carried out in the manner stipulated under the Building Control Regulations. MND also worked with Town Councils to disseminate flyers informing residents of their responsibilities for maintaining their air-conditioning units.

While the occurrence of falling air-conditioning units is rare, we cannot be complacent. The government will continue to engage homeowners and remind them of the role that they play in creating a safe living environment. Homeowners should also carry out checks every six months to ensure that there are no loosened or corroded parts in their air-conditioning units, as well as in the installations that hold these units in place.

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PUBLICATION OF FULL REPORT OF 22 MARCH FATAL TRAIN INCIDENT

89 **Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap** asked the Minister for Transport (a) whether LTA will make public the full report of the Accident Review Panel which investigated the fatal accident that occurred on 22 March 2016 near Pasir Ris MRT station; and (b) whether the Panel had concluded that the train driver was at fault and, if so, how was he at fault.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: The Accident Review Panel was convened by SMRT and it is their prerogative to decide whether to make the full report public. Findings from the investigations by the Land Transport Authority and the Ministry of Manpower will be made public after all investigations, including a possible Coroner's Inquiry, have been completed. This is so as not to prejudice any of the proceedings.

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REVIEW OF HEAVY VEHICLE SEASON PARKING SCHEME

91 **Mr Gan Thiam Poh** asked the Minister for National Development (a) what is the

progress in the review of the heavy vehicle season parking scheme; (b) when will drivers be able to change their existing season parking location to the location that they desire, subject to availability; and (c) whether there is a plan to build additional car parks for heavy vehicles at Old Tampines Road and Sengkang for residents at Hougang, Compassvale, Rivervale, Anchorvale and Fernvale.

Mr Lawrence Wong: Currently there are 43,785 heavy vehicle parking spaces island-wide, compared to a total of 33,760 heavy vehicles. About 74% of the spaces are provided by the private sector and 26% provided by URA and HDB. There are thus more than sufficient heavy vehicle parking spaces to meet total demand. The problem is a mismatch of demand at specific locations.

There is a high demand for heavy vehicle parking spaces near residential areas, as drivers prefer to park near where they live. However, it is not possible for the Government to provide more such spaces in residential estates, as most of our estates are highly built up and heavy vehicles generate disamenities such as noise, fumes and additional traffic.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of business owners to provide parking solutions for the vehicles they own, and also to work with their drivers on the appropriate transport options to commute to work, especially for those who have to drive during the wee hours.

URA and HDB allocate heavy vehicle season parking on a first-come first-served basis to residents who either live near or whose businesses are located near the vicinity of the heavy vehicle park. Transfer of location of the season parking places within public heavy vehicle parks is allowed, subject to availability. URA also allows mutual exchange of the season parking locations among drivers within its heavy vehicle parks.

Finally, there are about 1,640 public heavy vehicle parking spaces within the vicinity of Tampines Road and Sengkang. Season parking at these heavy vehicle parks are fully allocated. There are no plans to provide additional public heavy vehicle parking spaces in this area.

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