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| Parliament No: | 12 |
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| Sitting No: | 9 |
| Sitting Date: | 2012-01-09 |

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SINGAPORE

OFFICIAL REPORT

TWELFTH PARLIAMENT

PART I OF FIRST SESSION

VOLUME 88

Monday, 9th January, 2012

The House met at 1:30 pm

Column: 0

PRESENT:

Mr SPEAKER (Mr Michael Palmer (Punggol East)).

Mr Ang Wei Neng (Jurong).

Mr Chan Chun Sing (Tanjong Pagar), Acting Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports and Minister of State for Information, Communications and the Arts.

Mr Chen Show Mao (Aljunied).

Mrs Lina Chiam (Non-Constituency Member).

Mr Charles Chong (Joo Chiat), Deputy Speaker.

Mr Christopher de Souza (Holland-Bukit Timah).

Assoc Prof Fatimah Lateef (Marine Parade).

Mr Arthur Fong (West Coast).

Mr Cedric Foo Chee Keng (Pioneer).

Mdm Foo Mee Har (West Coast).

Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien (Yuhua), Senior Minister of State for Information, Communications and the Arts and the Environment and Water Resources.

Mr Gan Kim Yong (Chua Chu Kang), Minister for Health and Government Whip.

Mr Gan Thiam Poh (Pasir Ris-Punggol).

Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song (Non-Constituency Member).

Mdm Halimah Yacob (Jurong), Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports.

Mr Heng Chee How (Whampoa), Senior Minister of State, Prime Minister's Office and Deputy Leader of the House.

Mr Heng Swee Keat (Tampines), Minister for Education.

Mr Hri Kumar Nair (Bishan-Toa Payoh).

Mr Inderjit Singh (Ang Mo Kio).
Ms Indranee Rajah (Tanjong Pagar).
Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar (Ang Mo Kio).
Mr S Iswaran (West Coast), Minister, Prime Minister's Office, Second Minister for Home Affairs and Second Minister for Trade and Industry.
Dr Janil Puthucheary (Pasir Ris-Punggol).
Mr Khaw Boon Wan (Sembawang), Minister for National Development.
Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan (Hong Kah North), Minister of State for Health and Deputy Government Whip.
Dr Lam Pin Min (Sengkang West).
Er Dr Lee Bee Wah (Nee Soon).
Mr Desmond Lee (Jurong).
Ms Ellen Lee (Sembawang).
Mr Lee Hsien Loong (Ang Mo Kio), Prime Minister.
Mr Lee Kuan Yew (Tanjong Pagar).
Mr Lee Yi Shyan (East Coast), Minister of State for Trade and Industry and National Development.
Mr Liang Eng Hwa (Holland-Bukit Timah).
Mr Lim Biow Chuan (Mountbatten).
Mr Lim Hng Kiang (West Coast), Minister for Trade and Industry.
Mr Lim Swee Say (East Coast), Minister, Prime Minister's Office.
Ms Sylvia Lim (Aljunied).
Dr Lim Wee Kiak (Nee Soon).
Miss Penny Low (Pasir Ris-Punggol).
Mr Low Thia Khiang (Aljunied).
Mr Lui Tuck Yew (Moulmein-Kallang), Minister for Transport and Second Minister for Foreign Affairs.
Mr Mah Bow Tan (Tampines).
Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman (East Coast), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence and Minister for National Development.
Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap (Aljunied).
Assoc Prof Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim (Nee Soon).
Dr Lily Neo (Tanjong Pagar).
Dr Ng Eng Hen (Bishan-Toa Payoh), Minister for Defence and Leader of the House.
Ms Irene Ng Phek Hoong (Tampines).
Mr David Ong (Jurong).
Mr Ong Teng Koon (Sembawang).
Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng (Moulmein-Kallang).
Mr Pritam Singh (Aljunied).
Mr Seng Han Thong (Ang Mo Kio).
Mr K Shanmugam (Nee Soon), Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Law.
Mr Sitoh Yih Pin (Potong Pasir).
Mr Sam Tan Chin Siong (Radin Mas), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Acting Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports.
BG [NS] Tan Chuan-Jin (Marine Parade), Minister of State for National Development and Manpower.
Ms Jessica Tan Soon Neo (East Coast).

Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan (Nee Soon).

Mr Teo Chee Hean (Pasir Ris-Punggol), Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs.

Dr Teo Ho Pin (Bukit Panjang), Deputy Government Whip.

Mr Teo Ser Luck (Pasir Ris-Punggol), Minister of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam (Jurong), Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Minister for Manpower.

Ms Tin Pei Ling (Marine Parade).

Mr Edwin Tong Chun Fai (Moulmein-Kallang).

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan (Holland-Bukit Timah), Minister for the Environment and Water Resources.

Mr Wong Kan Seng (Bishan-Toa Payoh).

Mr Lawrence Wong (West Coast), Minister of State for Defence and Education.

Assoc Prof Dr Yaacob Ibrahim (Moulmein-Kallang), Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts and Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs.

Mr Alex Yam (Chua Chu Kang).

Mr Yaw Shin Leong (Hougang).

Mr Yee Jenn Jong (Non-Constituency Member).

Mr Alvin Yeo (Chua Chu Kang).

Mr Yeo Guat Kwang (Ang Mo Kio).

Mr Zainal Sapari (Pasir Ris-Punggol).

Mr Zainudin Nordin (Bishan-Toa Payoh).

Mr Zaqy Mohamad (Chua Chu Kang).

ABSENT:

Mr Ang Hin Kee (Ang Mo Kio).

Mr Baey Yam Keng (Tampines).

Dr Chia Shi-Lu (Tanjong Pagar).

Mr Goh Chok Tong (Marine Parade).

Mr Hawazi Daipi (Sembawang), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Minister for Manpower.

Mr Raymond Lim Siang Keat (East Coast).

Ms Low Yen Ling (Chua Chu Kang).

Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M (Tampines), Minister of State for Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs.

Mr Seah Kian Peng (Marine Parade), Deputy Speaker.

Ms Sim Ann (Holland-Bukit Timah), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Minister for Law.

Mrs Josephine Teo (Bishan-Toa Payoh), Minister of State for Finance and Transport.

Mr Vikram Nair (Sembawang).

Column: 4

PERMISSION TO MEMBERS TO BE ABSENT

Under the provisions of clause 2(d) of Article 46 of the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, the following Members have been granted permission by the Speaker to be absent from sittings of Parliament (or any Committee of Parliament to which they have been appointed) for the periods stated:

| Name | From (2011/2012) | To (2011/2012) |
|--|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Mr Teo Ser Luck | 24 Nov | 25 Nov |
| | 10 Dec | 11 Dec |
| | 13 Dec | 24 Dec |
| | 10 Jan | 11 Jan |
| Dr Lim Wee Kiak | 27 Nov | 28 Nov |
| Mr Goh Chok Tong | 28 Nov | 29 Nov |
| | 01 Dec | 04 Dec |
| | 11 Dec | 24 Dec |
| | 06 Jan | 14 Jan |
| Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M | 28 Nov | 28 Nov |
| | 07 Jan | 08 Jan |
| Mr Ang Hin Kee | 29 Nov | 29 Nov |
| Mr Christopher de Souza | 08 Jan | 12 Jan |
| | 29 Nov | 29 Nov |
| Mr Gan Thiam Poh | 30 Nov | 04 Dec |
| Assoc Prof Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim | 30 Nov | 02 Dec |
| | 15 Jan | 19 Jan |
| Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam | 01 Dec | 03 Dec |
| Mr Lim Biow Chuan | 02 Dec | 12 Dec |
| Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman | 03 Dec | 05 Dec |
| | 07 Dec | 14 Dec |
| | 18 Dec | 28 Dec |
| | 03 Dec | 07 Dec |
| Mr Seng Han Thong | 10 Dec | 12 Dec |
| | 24 Dec | 28 Dec |
| | 31 Dec | 04 Jan |
| | 03 Dec | 11 Dec |
| Mr K Shanmugam | 27 Dec | 01 Jan |
| | 05 Jan | 05 Jan |
| | 10 Jan | 11 Jan |
| | 04 Dec | 11 Dec |
| Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng | 04 Dec | 11 Dec |
| Mr Hawazi Daipi | 05 Dec | 12 Dec |
| | 15 Dec | 18 Dec |
| | 20 Dec | 24 Dec |
| | 05 Dec | 12 Dec |

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| | 08 Jan | 13 Jan |
| Dr Lily Neo | 06 Dec | 23 Dec |
| Dr Ng Eng Hen | 06 Dec | 06 Dec |
| | 16 Dec | 24 Dec |
| BG [NS] Tan Chuan-Jin | 06 Dec | 06 Dec |
| | 08 Dec | 09 Dec |
| | 15 Dec | 19 Dec |
| | 23 Dec | 23 Dec |
| Mrs Josephine Teo | 06 Dec | 06 Dec |
| | 17 Dec | 29 Dec |
| | 08 Jan | 12 Jan |
| Mr Baey Yam Keng | 07 Dec | 21 Dec |
| | 07 Jan | 08 Jan |
| | 08 Jan | 13 Jan |
| Mr Liang Eng Hwa | 07 Dec | 10 Dec |
| | 23 Dec | 28 Dec |
| Assoc Prof Dr Yaacob Ibrahim | 07 Dec | 10 Dec |
| | 10 Dec | 24 Dec |
| | 27 Dec | 27 Dec |
| | 05 Jan | 05 Jan |
| Mr Gan Kim Yong | 09 Dec | 11 Dec |
| | 13 Dec | 16 Dec |
| Mr Ang Wei Neng | 10 Dec | 17 Dec |
| Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan | 11 Dec | 11 Dec |
| | 24 Dec | 27 Dec |
| Mr Charles Chong | 12 Dec | 16 Dec |
| Mr Zainudin Nordin | 13 Dec | 15 Dec |
| | 19 Dec | 19 Dec |
| | 23 Dec | 27 Dec |
| Mr Lim Hng Kiang | 14 Dec | 22 Dec |
| Dr Vivian Balakrishnan | 15 Dec | 31 Dec |
| | 05 Jan | 05 Jan |
| Mr Lee Hsien Loong | 16 Dec | 27 Dec |
| | 05 Jan | 05 Jan |
| | 26 Jan | 27 Jan |
| Mr Sitoh Yih Pin | 16 Dec | 16 Dec |

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| | 19 Dec | 30 Dec |
| | 02 Jan | 04 Jan |
| Dr Teo Ho Pin | 16 Dec | 18 Dec |
| | 21 Dec | 21 Dec |
| | 22 Dec | 29 Dec |
| | 10 Jan | 19 Jan |
| Mr Alvin Yeo | 16 Dec | 27 Dec |
| Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien | 17 Dec | 27 Dec |
| Ms Irene Ng Phek Hoong | 18 Dec | 02 Jan |
| | 03 Jan | 03 Jan |
| Mr Lim Swee Say | 19 Dec | 27 Dec |
| Mr Lawrence Wong | 19 Dec | 27 Dec |
| | 10 Jan | 12 Jan |
| Assoc Prof Fatimah Lateef | 21 Dec | 24 Dec |
| | 18 Jan | 19 Jan |
| | 21 Jan | 01 Feb |
| | 09 Feb | 12 Feb |
| Mr Khaw Boon Wan | 23 Dec | 28 Dec |
| | 05 Jan | 06 Jan |
| Ms Tin Pei Ling | 23 Dec | 26 Dec |
| Ms Ellen Lee | 24 Dec | 28 Dec |
| Mdm Halimah Yacob | 26 Dec | 31 Dec |
| Mr Yeo Guat Kwang | 27 Dec | 29 Dec |
| Mr Arthur Fong | 04 Jan | 07 Jan |
| Mr Cedric Foo Chee Keng | 04 Jan | 06 Jan |
| | 17 Jan | 20 Jan |
| Mr Heng Chee How | 04 Jan | 07 Jan |
| Mr Chan Chun Sing | 05 Jan | 05 Jan |
| Mr Lui Tuck Yew | 05 Jan | 05 Jan |
| Mr Teo Chee Hean | 05 Jan | 05 Jan |
| Mr Vikram Nair | 06 Jan | 11 Jan |
| Dr Chia Shi-Lu | 09 Jan | 09 Jan |
| Mr Raymond Lim Siang Keat | 09 Jan | 09 Jan |
| Ms Low Yen Ling | 09 Jan | 09 Jan |
| Mr S Iswaran | 10 Jan | 13 Jan |
| | 15 Jan | 18 Jan |

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|-------------------------|--------|--------|
| Mr Wong Kan Seng | 10 Jan | 12 Jan |
| Mr Zainal Sapari | 12 Jan | 16 Jan |
| Ms Jessica Tan Soon Neo | 15 Jan | 21 Jan |
| Mr Lee Kuan Yew | 17 Jan | 22 Jan |
| Er Dr Lee Bee Wah | 21 Jan | 26 Jan |

Column: 7

ASSENTS TO BILLS PASSED

The following Bills were assented to by the President of the Republic of Singapore on the date stated:

08 December 2011

1. 1. Central Provident Fund (Amendment) Bill
2. 2. Customs (Amendment) Bill
3. 3. Goods And Services Tax (Amendment) Bill
4. 4. Income Tax (Amendment) Bill
5. 5. Stamp Duties (Amendment) Bill
6. 6. Telecommunications (Amendment) Bill
7. 7. Work Injury Compensation (Amendment) Bill

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Column: 7

PRIMARY CARE PARTNERSHIP SCHEME (PCPS)

1 **Dr Teo Ho Pin** asked the Minister for Health (a) how many Singaporeans have benefited from the Primary Care Partnership Scheme (PCPS) over the last three years; (b) how many General Practitioners (GPs) are currently participating in the PCPS; and (c) what measures are in place to encourage more GP clinics to participate in the scheme.

2 **Mr Gan Thiam Poh** asked the Minister for Health (a) what is the take-up rate so far by medical clinics/GPs to become partners/members of the Primary Care Partnership Scheme; (b) what is the total number of such partners and what is the number in Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC and Punggol South in particular; and (c) how does the Ministry incentivise more medical clinics/GPs to join the Scheme.

The Minister for Health (Mr Gan Kim Yong) : Mr Speaker, may I have your permission to take Question Nos. 1 and 2 together?

Mr Speaker : Yes.

Column: 8

Mr Gan Kim Yong : Sir, today, there are over 450 GP clinics participating in PCPS. For Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC, there are 16 PCPS clinics, with three located within Punggol South. Over the last three years, an average of 12,000 needy elderly and disabled patients benefitted from easy access to subsidised primary healthcare in private GP Clinics through PCPS each year.

As announced in August last year, PCPS will be enhanced to help more Singaporeans better manage their chronic diseases early and avoid unnecessary complications later. These enhancements, which will be implemented in January, include lowering the qualifying age for PCPS from 65 to 40 years old and raising the income criteria from \$800 to \$1500 per capita monthly household income to benefit middle- and low-income Singaporeans. Since August, approximately 10,000 people have signed up for PCPS.

To date, an additional 58 clinics island-wide had signed up to participate in the scheme and we expect more GPs to come on board once the expanded PCPS scheme comes into effect. MOH will also strengthen our engagement, through Agency for Integrated Care, to increase our GP participation rate.

In parallel to PCPS, MOH is currently seeking the inputs from the GP community to co-develop the Primary Care Masterplan. The plan aims to better support GPs in managing patients in the community. We are also looking at ways to streamline procedures such as the process for submission of claims to lessen the administrative work for GPs. I hope to share more details with you shortly.

I would like to reassure Mr Gan Thiam Poh and Dr Teo Ho Pin that my Ministry will continue to study ways to encourage more GPs to participate in PCPS, so that it would be more convenient for eligible Singaporeans to seek subsidised care at GP clinics close to their homes.

Dr Teo Ho Pin (Bukit Panjang) : Supplementary question, Sir. May I ask the Minister out of the 450 participating GPs, how many of them have seen less than 10 patients over the last one year? For GPs who are inactive, may I ask whether the Ministry has plans to encourage them to be more active in using the PCPS?

Mr Gan Kim Yong : Sir, I do not have the exact numbers with me today, but I would like to explain that the PCPS in the past was restricted to those aged 65 years and above. We have since lowered the age requirement. We have also liberalised the income criteria, so in terms of eligible Singaporeans for PCPS, it is a quantum change. With the new criteria, up to 700,000 Singaporeans will be eligible. The number of patients eligible for PCPS is going to be quite different from the past. I would like to encourage more GPs to come on board this scheme.

Mr Sitoh Yih Pin (Potong Pasir) : Sir, I would like to ask the Minister if MOH has plans to encourage more GPs to join this scheme. The feedback that we have been getting is this: in Potong Pasir, we have 10 GPs who qualify for PCPS. Out of the 10, three have signed up, two are signing up but five are still thinking about it. The five that are thinking about it gave us feedback that they think the claims process is rather long. One of them told us that she does not have a Personal Computer (PC) in her clinic. And because the claims have to be made online, she is not thinking of joining the PCPS.

Column: 9

Mr Gan Kim Yong : Sir, as I said in my reply just now, we are working on a masterplan. As part of engagement efforts for the masterplan, we are approaching GPs to engage them and explain to them what the new masterplan is about and to co-create this masterplan together with them. The masterplan also involves the creation of community healthcare centres. These centres will provide administrative support to GPs in administering their patients, especially schemes related to PCPS. With the Community Healthcare Centres (CHC), we will be able to provide additional support in terms of administrative work to lessen the burden on GPs. This will encourage more GPs to come on board the scheme. As to the Member's question about GPs without computers, we also have schemes to encourage GPs to come onboard our electronic system. We will also be able to provide support if they decide to computerise their clinics. We have schemes to help them introduce computerisation.

More importantly and not just for the PCPS, it is quite critical for our GPs to move towards electronic healthcare records. This will facilitate patient transfer between primary care and tertiary care. In the event that the patient needs hospitalisation, the hospital will then have access to the records of the patient electronically, rather than relying on manual records that are kept with his primary care doctor. If that doctor were to be on leave or were to go away for a period of time, his patients can be better cared for if the records are properly kept using computerisation. I would really encourage GPs to look at computerisation, beyond just participating in PCPS, as a step towards better care for their patients.

Dr Lam Pin Min : Sir, the objective of the PCPS is to help low- and middle-income families better manage chronic diseases. In order to cover a wider population, I would like to suggest to the Minister that we could remove the age criterion altogether, as long as the income criterion is met.

Mr Gan Kim Yong : Sir, I thank the Member for that suggestion. We will take on board his suggestion when we review the PCPS in future.

Column: 9

TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

3 **Mr Lim Biow Chuan** asked the Minister for Education what steps are taken by schools to ensure that teachers and students do not engage in inappropriate relationships.

The Minister of State for Education (Mr Lawrence Wong) (for the Minister for Education) : Mr Speaker, Sir, MOE expects all teachers to conduct themselves in a manner which upholds the integrity of the profession and the trust placed in them. The vast majority of our officers do so. MOE takes a very serious view of misconduct by teachers, particularly when it involves inappropriate relationships with students. Such teachers will be subject to disciplinary action, which typically results in dismissal and debarment from future employment with MOE.

All Beginning Teachers attend an orientation programme before they start work, where they learn about the Teachers' Creed which encapsulates the values and ethos of the teaching profession. In this context, they are briefed on the expected standards of professional conduct and the need to maintain proper relations with students at all times.

Column: 10

Schools have guidelines and measures to ensure that the daily interactions between teachers and students are conducted in a safe, mutually respectful and conducive environment for teaching and learning. For example, open spaces are created for teachers to interact with students. School leaders regularly remind teachers about appropriate behaviour through briefings and case studies.

The Academy of Singapore Teachers also runs professional learning sessions which remind teachers of their duty to uphold the professional image of the teaching service.

Unfortunately, despite these measures, incidents do occur that do not reflect well on the conduct of specific teachers. MOE thoroughly investigates every reported case of inappropriate relations between a teacher and a student and takes disciplinary action, where applicable.

Mr Lim Biow Chuan (Mountbatten) : Sir, supplementary questions. One, in view of the growing number of teachers who share their mobile phone numbers and who befriend their students on Facebook, how would MOE intend to ensure that these teachers do not subsequently develop inappropriate relationships with their students? Two, as tuition centres are registered under MOE, would

there be any monitoring of the teachers in the tuition centres to ensure that students undergoing tuition are not taken advantage of by bad hats within the tuition industry? At this stage, let me stress that I believe that majority of our teachers are true to their calling and doing a great job in their duties as teachers, but there will always be some black sheep and the question is how to weed out those black sheep.

Mr Lawrence Wong : Sir, I thank Mr Lim for the supplementary questions. As I mentioned earlier, there is a series of measures that are taken to emphasise to all teachers – and we have a growing number since we are expanding recruitment – the values, the professional ethics, the guidelines, the way they interact with students. This happens at entry into the National Institute of Education (NIE), where the guidelines, professional ethics, expectations and ethos of the teaching profession are emphasised to student-teachers. Upon graduation from NIE, again, beginning teachers go through a whole series of steps and processes to help them understand their roles and responsibilities as teachers, as well as the professional expectations and ethos of the Teaching Service. Within the schools, when the teachers are deployed to the schools, there is a series of beginning-teacher orientation programmes that help to guide each teacher through the first steps as a teacher. This is so that, within the school context, they also understand the responsibilities they have and the way they are supposed to interact between themselves and with students.

I believe we have various platforms, guidelines and many measures taken by MOE, NIE and the schools which allow us to make sure that even as we expand our teaching force, we will do our best to make sure that every teacher understands the expectations and responsibilities.

Tuition centres are licensed under MOE, but we take the lighter regulatory touch over these centres and tutors that these centres employ. This is very much between the tuition centres and the tutors. They are not quite within the school system. I think if there are issues there, we will certainly investigate in greater detail on a case-by-case basis.

Assoc Prof Fatimah Lateef (Marine Parade) : Sir, I would like to ask the Minister of State this: in the context of the issue being discussed, do all primary and secondary schools in Singapore now have school counsellors attached to them? As if so, can these people play a greater role in social, behavioural and relational issues related to teachers and students?

Column: 11

Mr Lawrence Wong : Sir, the answer is “yes”, and they are doing so.

Mr Zaqy Mohamad (Chua Chu Kang) : Sir, I would like to ask the Minister of State if MOE would consider extending the briefing of these guidelines to students as well. It takes two hands to clap and parents are also interested to ensure that their children are trained and well-versed with the guidelines. It may not just be teachers who are behaving inappropriately, but administration staff or other contractors that the schools employ.

Mr Lawrence Wong : Sir, I thank the Member for the supplementary question. We will certainly have a separate process to educate students and parents, and to reach out to them and engage them. I do not think the same set of guidelines will be applicable but these are all stakeholders which we would want to include. This will make sure that every party has the same expectations and that they are well-engaged in this process.

Mr Speaker : Mr Yee Jenn Jong, last question.

Mr Yee Jenn Jong (Non-Constituency Member) : Sir, I would like to point out that there is a big group of Allied Educators, part-time teachers and third-party service providers in schools. Perhaps MOE would also extend the guidelines to these organisations and people.

Mr Lawrence Wong : Sir, I thank the Member for the suggestion. I think as long as they are stakeholders involved in the education process, we would not leave them out in this process of making sure that these expectations, values and ethos of teachers are entrenched and are widely proliferated. That is something that MOE believes in. We take it very seriously.

Column: 11

FLASH FLOODS IN ORCHARD ROAD

4 **Mr Ang Wei Neng** asked the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources in view of the flash floods which occurred on 23 December 2011 (a) whether the recently completed flood management strategies such as the raising of Orchard Road helped to prevent the flash floods; (b) whether the SMS alert service had adequately alerted shop owners and shoppers at Liat Towers and Lucky Plaza of the water “ponding”; and (c) what additional measures would PUB take to mitigate similar occurrences in the Orchard area.

5 **Mr Yaw Shin Leong** asked the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources (a) what are the reasons for the “ponding” phenomenon in Orchard Road and what are the technical differences between “flash floods” and “ponding”; (b) whether the drainage improvement projects scheduled for 2012 would have any impact on the flooding/ponding situation in Orchard Road; and (c) to what extent was due diligence done to ensure that Orchard Road's drainage systems were clear of debris that could obstruct the flow of water.

The Minister for the Environment and Water Resources (Dr Vivian Balakrishnan) : Mr Speaker, Sir, may I have your permission to answer both Question Nos 4 and 5 together?

Column: 12

Mr Speaker : Yes, please.

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan : I thank both Members for their questions. Over the last six months, I have spent a lot of time walking the ground, looking at plans, maps and peering into drains. With the indulgence of the House, I propose to give a detailed answer and to take all supplementary questions thereafter.

Stamford Canal drains a catchment area of 631 hectares – that is quite a significant chunk. It starts upstream at the Botanic Gardens and Dempsey Hill. It extends downstream to Bras Basah and City Hall areas and ultimately drains into the Marina Reservoir. Orchard Road is a valley in the mid-section of this catchment area. It is bounded by higher ground to the north of Orchard Road, characterised by the Mount Elizabeth area. To the south is the Leonie Hill area. If Members would look even more closely, they would realise that there are two smaller hills Cuscaden in the west and Cairnhill in the east. What this means is that not only is there a valley, there is also – superimposed on this – a basin between Cuscaden and Cairnhill Roads. This explains why this particular stretch of Orchard Road is of special concern with regards to flooding.

There have been three episodes of flooding in the Orchard Road area over the past 18 months. On 16 June 2010, some 100 millimetres (mm) of rain fell in the area over two hours. This resulted in the stretch of Orchard Road between Cuscaden Road and Cairnhill Road being flooded to a depth of up to

300 mm. On 5 June 2011, a few days after I moved to the Ministry, some 124 mm of rain fell on those areas over about four hours, and caused the Tanglin area to be flooded to a depth of some 100 mm. Most recently, on 23 December 2011, even heavier rainfall occurred – this time, some 153 mm of rain over three hours was recorded over the same catchment area.

I have taken pains to state the numbers, but I want to remind Members of the trend that for these three episodes, each time, there has even been higher rainfall falling on the catchment area. These three episodes are really part of a larger and longer pattern of rainfall change that is occurring in Singapore. If Members would look at the second slide [*indicating*], we have plotted the maximum one-hour intensity of rain in each of these 30 years over the past three decades. I had the expert panel review this together with the scientists in the university. Their conclusion was that Singapore is experiencing, on a secular basis, increasing intensity of rainfall. Whether this continues into the future is something which will be measured and proven over time.

The point is that we are facing a situation of increasing rainfall intensity, together with increasing urbanisation, and Orchard Road is a case in point. Nevertheless, over the past three to four decades, PUB has invested very heavily in drainage infrastructure. They have spent about \$2 billion over the past three decades. This has, in fact, reduced the low-lying flood-prone areas in Singapore from 3,200 hectares (ha), which was the situation in the 1970s, to today's 49 ha. These are low-lying flood-prone areas. Prolonged extensive floods that some of us in this House – I think anyone who is above the age of 40 here – will remember that in our childhood, when floods inundated large areas and stayed for many hours, when traffic, services and many other things were disrupted, fortunately, no longer occurs. What we are confronted by today are transient localised episodes, typically lasting up to about half an hour or so, and they occur in areas where the rainfall intensity has temporarily overwhelmed the local drainage systems.

Column: 13

There was a question that I think Mr Yaw asked about: the technical difference between a flash flood and a pond. Let me just say that as far as I am concerned, PUB should not have used the word “ponding”. As far as I am concerned, I call a spade a spade – a flood is a flood. As long as there is water accumulating somewhere where it is not supposed to be, as long as it has implications on human safety or business operations, that is a flood, and it is a problem that needs to be resolved. PUB and the building owners must resolve it.

Let me now return to the episode on 23 December last year. What PUB actually intended to highlight was the fact that despite this being the third episode, and despite the fact that there had been even heavier rainfall, Orchard Road itself – the arterial road for traffic – remained passable at all times. To a large extent, this was because of the completion of the road-raising works which began last year and was completed by June 2011. This slide [*indicating*] attempts to show several things. The lowest line shows the profile of the bottom of the canal. You have a blue line above that, which is based on data derived during this heavy storm, together with a computer model, to indicate the level at the top of the canal. What this slide will show is that the section which we have indicated, had we not raised the road by June 2011, in December we would almost certainly have faced flooding on Orchard Road itself and traffic would have been impacted.

As far as the buildings were concerned, because all the building owners along this stretch of Orchard Road had been placed on alert and had taken extensive measures to mitigate the impact of flooding, the net result was that, in fact, the problems were confined primarily to the basements of Liat Towers and Lucky Plaza.

I met the building owners and the management of both these buildings. And I can assure the House that they are taking their mitigation and prevention measures seriously. For instance, Liat Towers has now completed building a 60 cm-high wall to prevent rainwater from overflowing from an internal drain into its basement. Lucky Plaza is in the process of installing new flood barriers to prevent water from the pavement flowing into its basement. In addition, they have also described that they are going to build some new sumps and pump systems so that they will be better able to cope with the flow of water. But it is noteworthy, and I think we should all remember, that Liat Towers and Lucky Plaza are very old buildings. They have been there for more than 30 years, and their basements really make them vulnerable. So, we may need both short-term and long-term measures.

There has also been much speculation by various people about the role of Marina Barrage. It is worth highlighting to the House that I instructed PUB to maintain the water level in Marina Reservoir during the entire month of December at below mean sea level. Even in the midst of the storm, with a heavy inflow of water from Stamford Canal and Bukit Timah Canal into Marina Reservoir, we were still able to maintain the level of water in Marina Reservoir below mean sea level. This is only possible because we have a barrage and we have gates and very large pumping systems. If we did not have a barrage, then we would not have a reservoir in the first place, and secondly, the water level in the lower reaches of the Singapore River, Stamford Canal and Kallang River would then be subject to tidal influences.

The point I am making is that, in fact, having a barrage, having pumps and having gates gives us more control, not less control. Having said all that, I should also point out that the level of water in Marina Reservoir does not affect the hydraulic situation of water in the upper reaches of Orchard Road, and this is simple physics. At Grange Road, the platform level is 108 metres; in other words, it is 8 metres above mean sea level. So, the real reason for keeping and controlling the water level in Marina Reservoir is to protect the low-lying areas like Chinatown and other areas in the city centre, which are the true low-lying flood-prone areas that we will recall from the days of our childhood.

Column: 14

Having said all that, in the long run, we do need to increase the capacity of Stamford Canal. I have set this very simple challenge to PUB. I said: let us assume that we will continue to have storms exactly similar to what we had in the last three episodes. In fact, let us assume further that they may even be worse than that. Within reasonable limits, in order to cope with such an incident, what kind of enhancement do we need to make to Stamford Canal? And the reply that the engineers came back to me with was that if we wanted to be able to be almost guaranteed that we could cope with similar storms of the last 18 months, then in the long run we needed to increase the capacity of Stamford Canal by 30%.

Well, here comes the next problem. I think many Members will be familiar that whenever PUB has a drain, we have a drainage reserve. In other words, we always have space where, if we need to – to deepen or widen the drain – we will take them from the owners of a public utility. In the case of Stamford Canal, which lies under Orchard Road, we have run out of drainage capacity. Secondly, to now embark on further surgery on Stamford Canal, would cause enormous disruption to the services and operations, and pedestrian and vehicular flows along Orchard Road.

I put all these to the House because I want Members to understand that we are constrained on the ground and, as I will explain later, there will also be major financial and fiscal factors that we have to take into account.

PUB is evaluating other options to increase the overall capacity of Stamford Canal. In fact, there is an ongoing consultancy study, which I think will only be completed in May this year. Some of the ideas

they are studying include building storm water detention ponds upstream. In the past, whenever we have to deal with the floods, the answer is very simple – increase the flow rate. You increase the flow rate by widening and deepening drains. I think we will need a more sophisticated approach in the future and it may involve, in fact, retaining water upstream, so that you reduce the peak flow rate during the peak of the storm. As I said earlier, we are trying to deal with flash floods, and not with prolonged periods of inundation like what we see in Thailand or other places of the world.

These detention ponds are not going to be cheap. To give Members again an idea of scale, they have a capacity of 40 to 50 Olympic-size pools. We will need land two to three times the size of a football pitch. Putting aside land like that in precious real estate in the Orchard Road area – I think Members will agree – is something which you do not enter into lightly.

There is also another idea which they are studying, which is to build a diversion canal to divert water from the upper third of the Stamford catchment, cut across the Grange Road highlands and ultimately to reach the Singapore River, somewhere around Zion Road. That will be another major engineering project which will cost \$300 million to \$400 million. Again, it is not something which we enter into lightly. PUB has built diversion canals and again for those who are old enough, you will remember that the Bukit Timah stretch used to flood very regularly and very severely. In fact, there are two diversion canals which divert some water from Bukit Timah Canal into Pandan Reservoir, and another part into the Kallang River. I am just giving Members an idea, so that you will understand the level and intensity, and the costs of these major projects. In the long run, these do need to be done. In the short run, there are also things which we need to do.

Column: 15

For instance, it is important for us to ensure that every single drain and canal that currently exists is free-flowing, not choked by litter and is performing according to specifications. PUB and its contractors have intensified their daily cleaning and inspection routine. In certain portions, they have even installed underground closed circuit television so that we can continuously monitor the performance of these canals. In preparation for the ongoing northeast monsoon, PUB has also stepped up the frequency of cleaning and inspection of drains, especially in flood-prone and litter-prone areas, and in areas with heavy leaf shedding.

The public also has a role to play. If Members should notice any drain that is clogged or dirty, please let us know. We have made it very convenient for you to call through to our 24-hour call centre or post a message on the PUB Facebook or through the iPhone application which we have also published for free.

We checked the drains in Orchard Road on 23 December 2011, including those in St Regis Residences, Orchard Towers, Liat Towers, and we did not find any drains to be blocked.

Let me now turn to building owners. PUB cannot solve this problem alone. It is necessary, at least in the short to medium term, that building owners take the initiative to protect themselves and take additional preventive measures. We will also review their SOPs with them because whenever things go wrong, it is not just a matter of infrastructure. It is also a matter of operational procedure. Does everybody who needs to know, know the facts, and to know the facts in real time? And has everyone taken appropriate action? This is a whole level of additional training and collaboration which we will need to go on with the building owners. Of course, we will make sure that building and renovation plans conform to drainage regulations. Members will also recall that just last month, we had, in fact, upgraded our draining regulations, raising platform levels, having crest-protection for basement carparks in order

to ensure that we do everything possible in the medium term to reduce the impact of floods. Beyond that, it is information. Last year, we made a free SMS alert system available which would make available to members of the public information on weather, rainfall, the level of water flowing within the canals. Over the last few months, we have continuously increased the number of sensors. Nowadays, fortunately, sensor technology is not as prohibitive as it was in the past and, depending on your area of interest, you can indicate to PUB which times you want to be alerted. For those who just enjoy a Twitter cascade, well, look for the hashtag #sgflood. I can assure you, PUB floods that hashtag because I believe that we need to ensure that accurate real-time information is available to everybody so that they can take appropriate measures.

Let me conclude by saying that the weather has changed. Increasing urbanisation has changed and although we are not dealing with prolonged periods of inundation, even flash floods in a built-up dense city like ours do have an impact. Therefore, we have to have plans for the long term to deal with this eventuality. In addition to that, we are embarking on both short-term maintenance as well as medium-term preventive and mitigative measures, and we are working with building owners and members of the public to deal with this.

Column: 16

Mr Ang Wei Neng (Jurong) : Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Minister for his comprehensive reply. We understand that it is going to be difficult to widen Stamford Canal, but could the Ministry perhaps also consider deepening it as one of the measures? Is it just a matter of costs? The second supplementary question is that we understand that PUB has also announced that it will do an enhancement on some 10 canals to handle the future flood situation. But we also learn from the Minister that the rainfall intensity in Singapore has increased quite tremendously. So for these 10 projects, how much of the capacity is PUB increasing? Would this increased capacity be able to handle the flash floods that we experienced in Orchard Road and more?

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan : If I could get the third slide back up, which will show Members the profile of the drains. Members should have a copy of it. Members will notice that, in fact, the Stamford Canal is already very deep. If we go any deeper, we will create a Stamford basin, which is not the objective. So the point is: we need to either slow down the rate of inflow instead Stamford Canal through detention ponds, or have an alternative bypass. The example I can give from the medical perspective is, if our coronaries are choked, we do a bypass. It increases the total capacity of the system. Equally related to that, something which I did not have time to explain is that we are examining the flow dynamics within Stamford Canal. For example, even without widening, whether perhaps by increasing the --- what is the technical term for it? Well, basically to reduce the friction to fluid flow within the canals, whether that can also buy us a few percentage points of increase in the transmission. We also have to make sure that there are no obstacles in there and, if there are services and other pipes which need to be moved, we will do so. In other words, I am trying to maximise the current utility of Stamford Canal without taking more land and without disrupting traffic and business any further.

The other point was intensity. The Member is absolutely right. It is also the reason the Ministry is investing more in climate science and in our ability to predict weather changes and to have some reasonable projections on the type of intensity we have to deal with. What I do know is that we do need to increase and enhance our planning norms, but this cannot be a blank cheque for PUB. Otherwise we will become an entire --- Well, Singapore does not intend to be Venice, with canals everywhere. So there has to be a reasonable limit to how much we prepare for the future. The assurance I will give is that we will do so on the basis of evidence, science and discipline as far as fiscal expenditure is concerned.

Mr Yaw Shin Leong (Hougang) : I thank the Minister for his comprehensive reply. It is heartening to hear the Minister share his candid response on the ponding versus flooding debate. I have three supplementary questions. One, would the Minister agree that the introduction of large scale developments in Singapore has resulted in an acute loss of open space that is open to absorb rainwater into ground water table, reducing excess run-off that could contribute to flooding. Two, would the Minister also consider going further upstream to treat the problem at the source by requiring developers to submit environmental impact assessments prior to each construction? This is a common best practice in developed cities around the world. Three, is MEWR integrating and coordinating such studies as part of its routine and ongoing system in view of PUB's drainage masterplan?

Column: 17

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan : Sir, I thank the Member for those three supplementary questions. The expert panel will be publishing its findings sometime later this week. In fact, this was also one question which we posed to them. As we urbanise Singapore, as there are more concrete and pavements everywhere, we would expect that there would be greater run-off or rapidity of flow of rain that has fallen on our pavements. What this means is that our drainage norms which were good enough in the past may not be good enough to cope with it. This is being taken into account.

The Member has quite rightly said therefore that future developments in Singapore need to take into account the impact on the environment. But it is in a larger sense of it. Every new building, road and new development makes a difference to drainage, pollution, traffic, health. It has multiple facets to this. So I agree with the Member's third point that, in fact, this calls for greater collaboration and integration among all the planning agencies and the approving authorities to ensure that future developments are sensitive, rational and enable us to cope with the changing climate.

Mr Speaker : Ms Irene Ng. Last question.

Ms Irene Ng Phek Hoong (Tampines) : Sir, the Minister spoke about the twin trends of increasing rainfall intensity and increasing urbanisation. Can I ask the Minister if he will conduct a review of all the masterplans for construction projects and land use to see whether there has been over-construction, and how we reserve land to put in place more protection for green areas. For instance, the Bukit Brown cemetery, whether it is really necessary to build over it. To just look over it with a fresh eye, given the information that we are affected by these twin trends. May I also ask the Minister whether the increasing rainfall intensity is due to climate change and, if so, what are the wider implications of this in Singapore, given that we are a low-lying flat island?

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan : I am not the Minister for National Development although I did spend some time there. Firstly, on the Masterplan. In fact, if we actually look at the map of Singapore, or the next time you fly in or out of Singapore, look out of the plane. You will realise that despite us being so crowded and dense, we still have a lot of green areas which MND and URA have deliberately sought to preserve. So we are not a concrete jungle. And I will take the risk of speaking on behalf of Minister Khaw Boon Wan to say, I am sure he does not intend for Singapore to become a concrete jungle where all rain that falls will flow along drains. That is not the case. The Member is absolutely correct that we need to get the balance right between development on the one hand and its impact on the environment on the other hand. I can give the Member the assurance that both the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, and the Ministry of National Development work very closely on this.

The point on Bukit Brown I believe should be a separate parliamentary question.

On climate change, this is a source of long-term worry. At this point in time – I will give some examples – there have been different models, and the model which we are paying special attention to is the one which projects a rise in sea level. There have been some reports that have suggested that Singapore needs to prepare, that by the end of this century, sea levels could rise by 65 mm or more. When I was in Durban in December 2011, I met a senior scientist from the World Meteorological Association. He said, “No, no, you need to be worrying about more than one metre of rise”, which is highly worrying for a low-lying city state like ours. We hope that these are changes which will take a few decades to unfold and, therefore, we will have time to prepare for it now.

Column: 18

For instance, last year, we made a decision that for all future reclamation projects, we will raise the platform level by an additional metre. This will cost us a lot of money in the short term because it means getting more sand. But we are buying insurance for the future. Similarly, if any of you are developing new buildings, for example homes and so on, you will often find that PUB will insist that you raise the platform level. Typically, in a specific area, if there has been a flood before and we know what the high level of flood is, we will insist that new developments start at a platform level of at least 600 mm above that.

Again, it is buying insurance for the future. So the point I am trying to make is that there are potential worrying long-term trends for us which we need to prepare for today. We need to do so in a careful, calibrated and rational way because otherwise, you end up taking the risk of either spending too much money in the short term or, worse, taking the risk of not being prepared for the future. I suppose most of us will not be here at the end of the century, but I think we still owe a responsibility to our children and grandchildren.

Column: 18

RECENT MRT TRAIN BREAKDOWNS AND DISRUPTIONS

(Committee of Inquiry, accountability and emergency response time)

6 **Mr Cedric Foo Chee Keng** asked the Minister for Transport what will be the composition of members of the Committee of Inquiry and what will be the terms of reference for the Committee of Inquiry into the recent MRT train breakdowns.

7 **Ms Sylvia Lim** asked the Minister for Transport (a) what will be the composition of the Committee of Inquiry set up to investigate the MRT train disruptions and emergency responses; (b) whether the Committee will conduct its hearings in public; and (c) whether the Committee will conduct primary fact-finding on the incidents or rely on reports put up by other agencies such as the Land Transport Authority.

8 **Mdm Foo Mee Har** asked the Minister for Transport (a) how is SMRT held accountable for the proper maintenance of trains as part of their obligation to avoid transport disruptions due to breakdowns; (b) whether SMRT employs an adequate maintenance regime of checks and rectifications and, if so, whether this regime been adhered to; (c) what emergency response plans have been established for service disruptions and disaster recoveries and whether these plans were complied with during the recent disruptions; (d) how is the emergency preparedness being tested to ensure the readiness of SMRT's staff and relevant Government agencies; and (e) what key principles have been prescribed to safeguard the safety and comfort of commuters in the event of emergencies.

9 **Ms Irene Ng Phek Hoong** asked the Minister for Transport (a) what is the number of incidences

of MRT service disruptions over the past five years and what are their underlying reasons; (b) what is the comparable rate of disruptions in other developed cities such as those in Japan and what are responses of train operators and commuters in such emergencies; (c) whether SMRT's Standard Operating Procedures for disruptions in areas such as alternative transport arrangements, crowd control and information dissemination are adequate; and (d) what further measures will be taken to ensure reliability of the train services and effective communication to commuters in the event of an emergency.

Column: 19

10 **Mr Low Thia Kiang** asked the Minister for Transport (a) what is the Government's role and accountability with regard to passenger safety in the event of an MRT service disruption; (b) how does the Government ensure that even with private companies operating the public transport system, the safety of passengers is not compromised in the event of such service disruptions; (c) what are the existing emergency response measures to rescue passengers who are trapped in an underground train for an extended period; and (d) how often does the Government review and assess the effectiveness of such measures.

11 **Mr Gan Thiam Poh** asked the Minister for Transport (a) whether an interval of two minutes is the minimum and the safest margin for MRT trains to run during peak hours; and (b) what is the safety precaution/measure taken by the MRT operators to ensure user safety in the event of a breakdown in the train signalling system.

12 **Er Dr Lee Bee Wah** asked the Minister for Transport (a) what are the reasons for the recent spate of breakdowns in the SMRT train system; (b) what are the plans drawn up to minimise breakdowns; (c) what is the standard operating procedure when a train breaks down; (d) what improvements have been put in place to ensure better multi-lingual communication with commuters; and (e) at which stage will the Singapore Civil Defence Force be activated to evacuate commuters who are trapped in stalled carriages.

13 **Er Dr Lee Bee Wah** asked the Minister for Transport in light of the discovery of weaknesses in the SMRT train disaster response system (a) how has this impacted on the Ministry's planning for any terror attack on the train system; and (b) why is this weakness in the SMRT response system not discovered during the mock exercises.

14 **Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song** asked the Minister for Transport (a) whether LTA has to date exercised its power to impose conditions relating to the appointment, re-appointment or removal of MRT operators' CEO, chairman or any of its directors; and (b) what criteria does the LTA use to decide when to impose such conditions.

The Minister for Transport (Mr Lui Tuck Yew) : Mr Speaker, Sir, I will be making a Ministerial Statement on the "Disruption of MRT train services on 15 and 17 December 2011" at the end of Question Time. May I request your approval to deal with the issues raised in Question Nos. 6 to 14 then.

Mr Speaker : You have my approval to defer Question Nos. 6 to 14 until the delivery of the Ministerial Statement. Question No. 15, Mr Desmond Lee.

Column: 19

RAMPS IN OLDER HDB ESTATES FOR ELDERLY AND DISABLED RESIDENTS

15 **Mr Desmond Lee** asked the Minister for National Development whether the HDB will consider

piloting a scheme to install ramps, at subsidised cost, for elderly and disabled residents who have mobility difficulties so that they can easily move up the steps to their homes in older HDB estates.

Column: 20

The Senior Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for National Development (Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman) (for the Minister for National Development) : Mr Speaker, Sir, HDB flats with steps at the entrances were designed and built in the 1970s and 1980s. The design was adopted to enhance the privacy of residents by limiting the view of the interior of the flats from the common corridors.

HDB has explored on the feasibility of replacing the steps with permanent ramps to facilitate access by the elderly and disabled residents. Unfortunately, in most instances, such ramp solutions are not feasible due to the lack of space along the corridors and the need to comply with fire safety requirements.

Nevertheless, flat owners who would like to install a ramp at their own cost can submit a request to the relevant Town Council for removable ramps bought from the market, or to HDB and the Town Council for custom-made, permanent ramps. Such requests will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to ensure that they do not cause disamenities to their neighbours.

Residents can contact the HDB for assistance or information on installing removable ramps. The HDB will be glad to advise them on the types of ramps available in the market that are suitable for their use. HDB itself is also conducting research in this area and hopes to be able to develop cost-effective solutions for such flats in future

Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng (Moulmein-Kallang) : Sir, I would like to ask the Senior Parliamentary Secretary if HDB will consider building the ramps for my residents in Rochor Centre because the corridors are actually wide enough and they will not be relocating until 2016.

Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman : We will ask HDB to study further the request of Ms Denise Phua.

Mr Zaqy Mohamad : Could I ask the Senior Parliamentary Secretary, for the flats that are involved, what is the profile of such flats? Will HDB consider subsidising such ramps for flats where the residents do not have access to lift on every landing?

Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman : Sir, at this point in time, HDB is reviewing the profile of residents in those blocks. We recognise that it is not easy and it is quite costly at this point in time. HDB will facilitate installing these removable ramps. For residents who have difficulties, we will look at it on a case-by-case basis.

Assoc Prof Fatimah Lateef : Can I ask the Senior Parliamentary Secretary if it is possible to consider building the ramps for flats which are located on the ground floor? These are the older flats, which we still have many of them in Singapore.

Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman : Sir, as mentioned, HDB is working with industry partners to customise more affordable solutions to suit the various configurations of these flats, whether it is on the ground floor or along the common corridors, or flats with steps at the entrances. At present, we are exploring possible cost-effective solutions. After we have finalised the plans, we will carry out some pilot implementation to assess its effectiveness. Depending on the receptiveness of the solutions by the

residents, we will take it up from there.

Column: 21

Miss Penny Low (Pasir Ris-Punggol) : Would HDB also consider building such facilities or ramps into the BTO scheme, especially BTO flats that are more popular with the elderly population? Would it be more cost-effective that way than to implement make-up measures later?

Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman : Sir, these flats were all built in the 1970s and 1980s. The current new flats and BTO flats are all with universal designs. Universal designs refer to flats that are designed with “barrier-free” access.

Mr Speaker : Mr Desmond Lee, last question.

Mr Desmond Lee (Jurong) : Can I ask the Senior Parliamentary Secretary what is the timeframe for the implementation of such a pilot project?

Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman : Sir, as regards the timeframe, HDB is exploring and looking at the various options. It is looking at the feasibility of bringing down the cost because it is quite high. It is hard to make ramps permanent, as it depends on the configuration of the flat. But we will continue to look at those solutions and update Members when we have arrived at the solutions.

Column: 21

HOME IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME (HIP)

(Update)

16 **Mr Ang Wei Neng** asked the Minister for National Development (a) if he can provide an update on the implementation of HDB's Home Improvement Programme (HIP); (b) in the last five years, what is the number of HDB flats reported to have spalling concrete problems, particularly for HDB flats that were built between 1983 and 1986; and (c) whether HDB would consider accelerating the HIP for precincts with high number of flats that have spalling concrete problems.

The Minister of State for National Development (Mr Lee Yi Shyan) (for the Minister for National Development) : Sir, the Home Improvement Programme (HIP) was introduced in 2007 to upgrade older HDB flats that were built before 1987 with useful improvements within the flats. These include toilet upgrading, replacing clothes-hanging pipe sockets and addressing the maintenance problems such as spalling concrete. So far, 300,000 flats were identified to be eligible for HIP, and this number is about one-third of all the total flats in Singapore. Fifty thousand flats have been selected for the HIP so far and of these, works have been completed for 5,800 flats. HIP for the remaining 250,000 flats will be implemented over the next 10 years.

We are accelerating the HIP implementation. Over the next five years, we aim to cover 160,000 flats out of the 250,000 flats.

As for the problem of spalling concrete, there were 8,300 cases reported annually. This means an average incidence rate of less than 1% per year. For older flats built between 1983 and 1986, the corresponding incidence rate averaged 2% per annum. In other words, the older flats tend to have higher incidence rate of spalling concrete. The higher incidence is not surprising as spalling concrete is a result of natural wear and tear as buildings age.

Column: 22

Flat owners are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of their homes, including repairs to spalling concrete. Nevertheless, where spalling concrete occurs as a result of a ceiling leakage, HDB has a Goodwill Repair Assistance scheme to help the affected units to co-pay the repair cost.

Mr Ang Wei Neng : I thank the Minister of State for the reply. During the house visits, I had residents who said that they were very grateful that HDB had co-paid the repair of the spalling concrete through the co-paying scheme. But many of them have said that the problem actually reoccurs after three to five years. So, the question is: under the HIP Programme, does the HDB use a different kind of techniques to make it more lasting?

The second supplementary question is this. Different precincts, even within the Jurong Central, which is my ward, have different incidence of spalling concrete. In certain precinct, although the flats are of the same age, it appears to have more cases of spalling concrete. So for such precincts that have a higher number of spalling concrete cases as compared to other precincts, will HDB consider initiating a comprehensive check on these precincts if these precincts are not included in the HIP list for the next five years?

Mr Lee Yi Shyan : I thank Mr Ang for his two supplementary questions. First of all, it may be useful to understand a little bit more about how spalling concrete happens. Spalling concrete happens when the carbon dioxide in the air gets infused into the concrete of the building, and concrete by nature is alkaline. For those of us who studied chemistry, we would know that carbon dioxide is slightly acidic. So when it neutralises the alkalinity of the concrete, the steel bar inside the concrete will have a higher chance to rust. Therefore, when it rusts, it expands. When it expands, it causes stress onto the concrete and some of those concrete may as a result fall. So, it is important for flat owners, whether in a private flat or in an HDB flat, to take constant action to repaint their house because paint is a form of sealant, or to repair cracks as and when they happen. This will retard the onset of carbonation and spalling concrete. Given that this is a fact, we just need to pay attention to cracks and the leakage in the ceiling. I will encourage Mr Ang to get in touch with HDB to make full use of the Goodwill Repair Assistance programme for those flats that seem to have higher incidence rates. The HIP Programme is however not just to address spalling concrete issues, it is also a systematic programme to replace water pipes and waste pipes in the flat itself. Spalling concrete is one important factor. But, generally speaking, the age of the flat is the other very important factor where we would decide how to allocate flats or precincts for HIP Programme.

The other question that Mr Ang has is about improvements in techniques and materials used for subsequent building of the new flats. It is true that in recent years, improvement has been made in terms of the kind of material that is being developed as part of the mixer to the concrete as well as the way to build it. So for newer flats, we expect them to have lesser problems in terms of spalling concrete. In fact, for flats that are built after year 2005, HDB has introduced a 10-year warranty for such flats against spalling concrete.

Mr David Ong (Jurong) : How does the Ministry prioritise flats for the HIP? At Bukit Batok, we have a lot of old flats. So for our residents to wait 10 years is quite a daunting thought.

Mr Lee Yi Shyan : Yes, I would like to thank the Member for this supplementary question. I think it generally reflects the sentiments of many MPs. It is true that each of us wishes that the HIP can cover more flats in our own precincts. But at the macro scale, we are covering about 300,000 flats, which is one-third of all the HDB flats that were built on this island. Budget is definitely a consideration. That notwithstanding, I think we are increasing our budget for the HIP over the next three years by a quantum

of about 20%. However, industry capacity is also another problem. As we ramp up flat construction, and our construction industry is still doing very well, whether we have enough contractors that are able to carry out the work is another bottleneck. Sir, I think we would implement HIP as fast as we can, as fast as the industry can absorb, and benefit as many households as possible.

Column: 23

Mrs Lina Chiam (Non-Constituency Member) : Thank you, Sir. I would like to ask will the Minister of State to consider prioritising the flats at Lorong Toa Payoh for HIP since they are over 35 years old now. And I think it is very important because there were lots of problems when Mr Chiam was an MP for Potong Pasir.

Mr Lee Yi Shyan : Sir, the HIP programme is designed for flats built before 1987, so many of those flats before that would be eligible. However, we still need a system of prioritising across the island and I can understand Mrs Chiam's anxiety. My own constituency's flats in Bedok were built in 1977 and 1978. Many of them have the need for repair. So, we will just have to be fair, to spread HIP throughout the island.

Column: 23

NEXT-GENERATION FRONTLINE POLICING MODEL

17 **Ms Sylvia Lim** asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs in light of the change in the community policing model announced by the Ministry in November 2011 that will be implemented within the next three to five years (a) in what ways is the current community policing model deemed inadequate or not optimal to meet current or anticipated policing needs; and (b) what are the outcomes that the public should expect the Next-Generation Frontline Policing Model to deliver.

The Minister, Prime Minister's Office, Second Minister for Home Affairs and Second Minister for Trade and Industry (Mr S Iswaran) (for the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Home Affairs) : Mr Speaker, Sir. I thank the Member for her question. On 14 November last year, I announced that the Police will be embarking the Next-Generation Frontline Policing Model and laid out its main considerations and the features. And so, let me reiterate the feature points.

Our Frontline Community Policing Model has to keep pace with the changing environment, demographic trends and also the changing general community. We started with the Neighbourhood Police Post (NPP) system in the 1980s, as Members will recall, and moved on to the Neighbourhood Policing Centre (NPC) Model in the 1990s -- 1997 to be precise. The NPC model has been successful in supporting our crime fighting efforts.

The fundamental philosophy has always been that the community and the Police are partners in keeping our neighbourhoods safe. This remains unchanged. However, Policing must adapt to changes in the operating environment and this model is an effort in that direction.

In particular, the complexion of our community has changed. Mature estates now have more senior citizens who live on their own in several instances. Newer estates tend to have small nuclear families who moved in recently and may not yet have formed deep neighbourly bonds that we are familiar with in the older estates. Singapore's population is also now more diverse with new migrants. Therefore, we will have to invest more to engage the community, in a more customised and tailored manner, so as to sustain and strengthen this partnership between the Police and the community.

Column: 24

Today, technology also offers more opportunities with solutions that are more capable and cost effective than in the past. We will therefore further leverage on technology, and this will also enable us to deploy our Police officers in a more strategic and targeted way to fight crime and to serve residents better.

We expect these changes to enhance the Singapore Police Force's ability to prevent, deter and detect crime, and translate into a better sense of security for Singaporeans in their neighbourhood. We will announce more details of this Model at the upcoming Committee of Supply debates.

Ms Sylvia Lim (Aljunied) : Sir, I have four supplementary questions for Minister. I read the speech quite carefully in November and I noted that he mentioned then, that under this new Frontline Model, the NPCs will be better able to fight crimes in the community such as harassment by unlicensed moneylenders. So, my first question is whether he is actually saying that under the current system, somehow, the NPCs are not able to fully respond to this problem of harassment by unlicensed moneylenders.

Second question is that when the NPCs were first rolled out, there was a promise that they would be the origin of dedicated resources for pro-active Policing. So, my question is, does the Government assess now that, that has not been fully implemented and it is not able to actually marshal the resources to handle community problems, which it was originally intended to do.

My third supplementary question is: Minister mentioned in November that the New Model will envisage Police officers be assigned specific beats so that they will have more intimate knowledge of the ground and cultivate long and lasting ties. My question is: are we now going back to the form of patrolling that used to be in place under the NPP system, where we have more intimate street patrols, vertical Policing?

My last question is concerning NPPs. In the speech in November, the Minister mentioned that we will leverage more on technology for the NPPs so that officers could be re-deployed. Sir, my question is: what is the fate of the NPPs? Does it mean that they become unmanned, or is there a vision of what it will become under this new model?

Mr S Iswaran : Mr Speaker, Sir. I thank the Member for her supplementary questions. I will endeavour to keep this brief to avoid another Ministerial Statement. Firstly, the NPCs – and I think the specific point the Member has raised is whether this is a specific response to unlicensed moneylending activity and whether it is a comment on the NPCs' ability to cope with that. If the Member recalls, at the last sitting, there was a Parliamentary Question (PQ) on this specific point and one of her GRC colleagues has also raised this point. And I think overall, the Police has already undertaken significant steps to deal with the problem of unlicensed moneylending (UML). The data is on the down trend and it has been so in the last two years but the Police are continuing in that effort. So, this has got no specific comment or inference to be drawn with respect to the effort against UML. That remains a priority for the Police force and that has been addressed through a systematic and targeted effort.

Column: 25

Secondly, the question is: is this a comment on the availability or allocation of resources to past community policing efforts, which I believe as thrust of the Member's second supplementary question. The answer is: clearly, we are adapting to different circumstances. Now, in this respect and as I emphasised in my earlier statement, the demographic changes we see on the ground – some of the structural relationships on the ground and also the new type of residence communion -- necessitate a

different kind of policing response. The Police has accessed that this a way forward and moving into the new regime of frontline policing. In doing that, there are different implications. Some rules will be transformed in the Police. Some rules will be re-defined. We will enhance certain responsibilities, maybe certain things may be taken over by other technology and other solutions. So, the net impact is, there will be more resources required on the ground for this and that is something that the Police and the Ministry of Home Affairs are working on to staff up. But that in itself is not a comment that previously they were under-resourced. And I think the key point here is that there are some specific changes envisaged and in order to better deal with anticipated and some of the emerging challenges, that is where this effort is focused on.

For the specific beats: is this is reverting to the old NPP model? The answer must be is that: when we move from an NPP model to an NPC model, the idea was really to allow the Police greater professional flexibility in responding to challenges on the ground on a larger area. The NPPs, as all Members will be well aware, are very localised, specific locations and therefore the staffing and the manning levels are also quite tight; which means they have limited capability to respond. When you elevate this to a level, not to that of a division, but it is somewhere in between, like the Neighbourhood Police Centres, what you do is you empower the Police Commander to make important tactical decisions, how to deploy his men in response to different needs on the ground. So, Policing beats: yes, this is going to be an important part of that effort going forward. But how you deploy, what frequencies, where and what times, and being able to switch from area to area -- these are the kinds of flexibilities we will endow the Police Commander to have in this new model.

And finally, if we are using new technology, what is the fate of the NPPs? The Member said that she read speech carefully. If she had read it carefully, she would also know that we are working on an e-NPP model and that would be part of the process going forward.

Column: 25

SUBTITLING OF IMPORTANT TV BROADCASTS

18 **Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng** asked the Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts whether his Ministry would consider the provision of subtitling for all important TV broadcasts such as the National Day Rally, General Elections and those relating to national security so that the hearing-impaired population has access to the information.

The Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts (Assoc Prof Dr Yaacob Ibrahim) : Sir, the Government recognises the need to ensure that programmes of national significance such as the National Day Rally and Elections programmes are accessible to all segments of our society, including the hearing-impaired community.

Column: 26

Let me first share with Members of the House that efforts have been made over the years to cater to our society's diverse information and entertainment needs. Today, news bulletins on most of the free-to-air TV channels carry subtitles. The successful implementation of news subtitling has been made possible through a partnership between the Government and MediaCorp, in consultation with the Singapore Association for the Deaf.

In addition, Sir, subtitles are also provided for several Public Service Broadcast (or PSB) TV programmes. These include children's programmes, current affairs programmes, documentaries and drama series. Furthermore, MediaCorp also ensures that resources are dedicated to the provision of

subtitles for programmes on prime time, since this is when most viewers are tuned in.

With regards to Ms Phua's concerns, I would like to assure the hon. Member that both MICA, MCYS and the Media Development Authority (MDA), together with the national broadcaster, MediaCorp, are committed to do more to provide the hearing-impaired community with access to programmes of national significance. I am pleased to share that MDA has initiated discussions with MediaCorp to identify feasible solutions that can be delivered in a cost effective manner. However, I also seek the Member's understanding that such subtitling solutions can be resource-intensive, especially for "live" broadcasts; so we need to find a solution that is both practical and sustainable.

Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng : Sir, I thank the Minister for the support. I know MICA has always been very supportive, even under the previous Minister. A supplementary question, Sir. I refer back to my question – so when will MICA be open to consider the provision of subtitling for the National Day Rally, the General Elections and other broadcasts relating to national security, for example, when there are national disasters and so forth?

Assoc Prof Dr Yaacob Ibrahim : Sir, as I have mentioned in my reply, we are studying ways together with MediaCorp to find feasible solutions. And the case with the National Day Rally: the script of the Prime Minister's actual delivery is not available because it is not delivered verbatim. It is difficult for us to provide the subtitles immediately. But it is possible for the subsequent telecasts which are delayed, although again it depends on the time that we broadcast the speech immediately after the "live" telecast. Bear in mind that because of the difficulty faced with "live" broadcasts depends on when the speeches are made available, MediaCorp had provided some solutions in terms of providing captions to summarise some of the key messages during the Rally and when the written speech is posted online.

Mr Speaker : Ms Phua, last question.

Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng : Thank you, Sir. I thank the Minister for his answer. The deaf community has expressed a high interest in for example, the Prime Minister's National Day Rally. I would suggest that if it is really not possible to subtitle everything, then at least provide other solutions like signing for these important messages, and especially for national security as well. National security messages are important. The deaf cannot hear the messages and they need help.

Assoc Prof Dr Yaacob Ibrahim : We share the Member's concern. In terms of signing, we have in fact, consulted the Singapore Association for the Deaf because we are not the experts. There are different modes of signing available. We can choose to go with the one that goes word by word, which is very slow, or we can go what is called "native language signing" which is by a group of words. Again, it will be very difficult. I want to assure the Member that we are exploring the solutions together with the experts in MediaCorp to try as much as possible for all programmes of national significance to have them available to our hearing-impaired community.

Column: 27

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE SCHEME

(Update)

19 **Assoc Prof Fatimah Lateef** asked the Acting Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports (a) how many families and individuals are currently on the Public Assistance Scheme; (b) how does this compare to numbers over the last four years; (c) how many of these families and individuals are the same ones carried forward from year to year and how many are new additions; and (d) how

many have been able to leave the scheme and become financially independent.

The Acting Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports (Mr Chan Chun Sing) : Mr Speaker, Sir. The Public Assistance (PA) scheme provides long-term financial assistance to individuals and families who have little or no means of support, including those who are permanently not able to work due to age, disability or serious illness. Most Public Assistance beneficiaries are, there are elderly persons and those with disabilities.

The number of households on the Public Assistance scheme has been fairly stable over the past few years. Today, we have about 3,000 Public Assistance households. There were 2,942 households on the scheme in 2010; 2,930 in 2009; 2,886 in 2008 and 2,930 in 2007.

There has been a small increase in the number of new households placed on Public Assistance each year. In 2010, 397 new households were placed on Public Assistance, compared to 375 in 2009; 292 in 2008 and 278 in 2007.

Over the same period, an average of 354 households exited the scheme. Of those who exited the scheme in 2010, about four in 10 had passed away. Another 40% who were no longer able to live independently were admitted into Government-funded nursing homes or institutions, where they received full Government subsidies.

Given the profile of PA beneficiaries, only a very small number would leave the scheme because they have attained financial independence. Less than 2% left the scheme when their financial status improved after they became eligible for regular payouts, for example from the Central Provident Fund (CPF). About 1% left after their children grew up and started working.

Most Members are familiar with the PA scheme given its longer history. Let me take this opportunity to emphasise that it is just one of the many assistance schemes we offer. There are many other assistance packages, available to needy Singaporeans, depending on their needs. Under ComCare, for example, MCYS extends financial assistance to Singaporeans who require temporary assistance to tide over a difficult period, for example, while they are looking for a job or recovering from an illness. Families typically receive help for varying duration, ranging from three months to 24 months.

Column: 28

Assoc Prof Fatimah Lateef : Sir, I thank the Minister for the answer. Can I just find out, on average, how much does the Government spend per PA recipient per annum? And secondly, is it compulsory for all PA recipients to be tagged to a Family Service Centre in the vicinity of their home?

Mr Chan Chun Sing : Mr Speaker, Sir, the assistance that the Government gives to every Public Assistance person depends very much on the circumstances. We know that for the cash outlay, it is about \$400 but that does not include the other forms of help that the Government agencies provide to them. These include rental subsidies and medical subsidies. As to the attachment of a PA recipient to a Family Service Centre: yes, indeed, we would like to happen where possible because we know that people who are on Public Assistance are not only in financial distress. Many of them would have many other issues that require help. And it is on this note that we would like to work with the community and other agencies located around the people who need help to extend their help to these people in a holistic manner.

Dr Lily Neo (Tanjong Pagar) : Mr Speaker, may I ask the Minister whether the eligibility for Public Assistance Scheme be made more humane in order to accommodate more people on long-term needs?

Mr Chan Chun Sing : Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the Member for the supplementary question. Yes, we in MCYS are constantly looking at various ways to help more Singaporeans in need. These include those not just the Public Assistance (PA) Scheme but all our schemes. We are constantly reviewing the criteria that we use to assess the eligibility of the recipients. And my assurance to all Members of this House is that if you find somebody and you know of somebody who needs help in any way, form or manner, if he does not fit into any of our schemes at any point in time, let us know because that might be a reason for us to review the scheme or it might also require us to more creative in finding other ways to help our fellow Singaporeans. So we are constantly doing this, on a day-to-day basis to make sure that we extend help to all Singaporeans who need that help.

Column: 28

TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP TRADE NEGOTIATIONS

(Impact on Singapore's tobacco control measures)

20 **Dr Janil Puthuchery** asked the Minister for Trade and Industry whether Singapore's tobacco control measures could be at risk as a result of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade negotiations, given the challenge that the Australian government is facing on its tobacco regulation.

The Minister for Trade and Industry (Mr Lim Hng Kiang) : Mr Speaker, Sir, the Member's question refers to new legislation passed by the Australian Parliament in November 2011 to enforce plain packaging requirements for tobacco products. This means that corporate logos and any brand imagery will not be allowed to appear on the packaging of tobacco products such as cigarette packs.

Column: 29

Singapore's current tobacco control measures do not contain such plain packaging requirements. Parliament may recall that the Smoking (Control of Advertisements and Sale of Tobacco) Act was amended in July 2010 to include a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising and the prohibition of misleading labels such as smile or light which may imply that the product is less harmful. These tobacco control measures were enacted to protect public health and are in line with World Health Organization standards. As with all Government policies, these measures have been implemented with full consideration of our international obligations.

Australia is the first country in the world to introduce such plain packaging requirements which have been challenged by tobacco firms on grounds of trademark rights infringement. Singapore, together with several other countries, is watching this development closely. Negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Free Trade Agreement (FTA) are currently ongoing. As with all FTA negotiations, MTI will continue to consult closely with all relevant agencies to ensure that Singapore's interests including the protection of public health are secure.

Dr Janil Puthuchery (Pasir Ris-Punggol) : Mr Speaker, Sir, I have three supplementary questions. Could the Minister please comment on the extent to which tobacco features in the negotiations of the TPP? Is there a possibility to exclude tobacco from these negotiations? And is there an anticipation of an effect on the price or availability of tobacco products in Singapore as a result of these negotiations?

Mr Lim Hng Kiang : Sir, currently, tobacco does not feature significantly in the TPP negotiations. As with many of the FTAs with the high levels of ambition, one with as complete a coverage of products as possible, it is unlikely that tobacco will be excluded. And we do not expect that there will be significant price impact on Singapore.

Column: 29

COURT OF APPEAL'S RULING ON MUHAMMAD BIN KADAR'S CASE

21 **Mr Desmond Lee** asked the Minister for Law in view of the Court of Appeal's recent ruling in the case of *Muhammad bin Kadar & Anor v PP* [2011] SGCA 44, whether there have been any changes to the operating procedures of the prosecution and law enforcement agencies on the disclosure of unused material in criminal cases and, if so, what are these changes.

The Minister for Law (Mr K Shanmugam) : I thank Mr Lee for his question. The Ministry of Law introduced a disclosure regime in the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) 2010. This change in the law was generally welcomed.

During the Second Reading, I had said the following, in respect of general disclosure obligations: “lawyers appearing in Court, whether Prosecution or defence lawyers, are officers of the Court. If they deliberately suppress material evidence, they will be acting in gross breach of their duties. One cannot put forward evidence in Court while holding back other evidence which could put a different complexion on the evidence that has in fact been tendered in Court. I have no doubt that the Court will take a serious view of such conduct.”

Column: 30

In Muhammad Kadar's case, the Court of Appeal referred to and relied on this statement, and explained the nature and extent of the Prosecution's duty, to disclose material in its possession which it does not intend to use as part of its case.

The Court of Appeal held that the Prosecution is under a legal duty to disclose two types of unused material in its possession. One, unused material which is likely to be admissible and might reasonably be regarded as credible and relevant to the guilt or innocence of the accused. And two, unused material which is likely to be inadmissible, but would provide a real chance of pursuing a line of inquiry that leads to material that is likely to be admissible and that might reasonably be regarded as credible and relevant to the guilt or innocence of the accused. Any doubt on these issues is to be resolved in favour of disclosure.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government, the Judiciary and the Public Prosecutor are all charged with and concerned that each and every accused person has available all relevant and credible material in the Prosecution's possession that may aid his or her defence. The application of the principle is a matter for judgment in each case. The Prosecution must assess its disclosure obligations professionally and in good faith.

In the Kadar case, the Kadar brothers, Muhammad and Ismil, were initially charged for the murder of the victim in the flat she shared with her husband. The husband of the victim told the police that there was only one assailant. This was recorded in a statement dated 4 September 2005.

The Prosecution did not, at first, disclose the husband's statement. The presence of both the accused persons at the scene was not initially disputed, though later, Ismil disputed this, when he gave notice of an alibi. Second, the husband was in poor health and immobile at the time of the alleged crime. He was in the bedroom while the victim was killed in the living room. And he could only give his statement through gestures. The Prosecution took the view that the husband was in no position to know how many assailants there were and that his evidence was unreliable.

In March 2007, while the trial was ongoing, counsel for Muhammad and Ismil informed the

Prosecution for the first time that Muhammad was taking sole responsibility for killing the deceased. The trial was stood down for the Prosecution to consider its position. Separately, defence counsel also applied to discharge themselves. The Prosecution eventually decided to proceed against Muhammad and Ismil as charged. Given Muhammad's position, the Prosecution, on 4 September 2007, disclosed Mr Loh's statement which had been made on 5 September 2005 to the defence. This was six days before the trial resumed on 10 September 2007. Two sets of interview records, which were made before the statement was recorded, and were in the same terms as the statement, were also subsequently disclosed.

The Court of Appeal took the view that on the facts, the husband's statement and the interview records should have been disclosed earlier. I think the conclusion is one which most lawyers will agree with.

I have consulted with the Attorney-General on the changes in prosecutorial practice arising from Kadar. The Attorney-General's Chambers have taken into account the Kadar judgment when assessing the disclosure obligations in each case. The process begins early on at the pre-trial stage and continues until the conclusion of the case.

Column: 31

Prosecutors have also been briefing investigators on the requirements laid down in Kadar. Investigators who are alive to the issues can effectively assist the Prosecution in fulfilling its disclosure obligations.

Since the enactment of the CPC 2010, the Attorney-General's Chambers have been working on a joint Code of Practice for prosecutors and defence counsel, which will carry general guidance on disclosure. At the same time, the criminal bar and prosecutors from the Attorney-General's Chambers have also engaged in discussion to work out on guidelines on the Prosecution's disclosure obligations under Kadar.

3.00 pm

Mr Speaker : Order. End of Question Time.

[Pursuant to Standing Order No. 22(3) Written Answers to Question Nos. 22-25, 28, 30, 34-37, 40, 46, 48-49, 51-54 and 56 on the Order Paper are reproduced in the Appendix. Question Nos. 26-27, 29, 31-33, 38-39, 41-45, 50, 55 and 57 have been postponed to the next available sitting of Parliament.]*

Column: 31

DISRUPTION OF MRT TRAIN SERVICES ON 15 AND 17 DECEMBER 2011

(Statement by the Minister for Transport)

The Minister for Transport (Mr Lui Tuck Yew) : Mr Speaker, Sir, Members have raised concerns and queries regarding the two service disruptions on the North-South Line (NSL) that took place on 15 and 17 December 2011. I know that the two incidents were extremely disruptive and could have been better managed. I know it caused a significant amount of uncertainty, frustration and distress to commuters, and especially the passengers that were in the stalled trains because they were placed in the position of great duress. And I fully understand that for the disruption to have happened on 15 December, to be followed in short order by another disruption on 17 December, was clearly unacceptable to Singaporeans. Let me start by providing to this House a brief account of the facts of the case as we know them today, while we leave the Committee of Inquiry (COI) to do its work in the

coming months. I will also update this House on some of the preliminary lessons learnt and the potential weaknesses that have been identified in our current framework as we make every effort to put things right and to restore confidence in the MRT system.

On the evening of 15 December, an estimated 127,000 commuters were affected by a major disruption to service along the North-South Line from Marina Bay station to Braddell station. Four trains stalled, one between City Hall and Dhoby Ghaut stations, one between Somerset and Orchard stations, one at Braddell station, and one just before Braddell station. The trains stalled because of misalignment between the trains' current collector shoes and the power rail that is commonly referred to as the "third" rail. The trains draw locomotive power from the third rail through the train current collector shoes. Due to the misalignment, the trains were unable to draw power and stalled.

Column: 32

Two days later, a second service disruption took place on the North-South Line on the morning of 17 December. Once again it caused distress and inconvenience, this time to about 94,000 commuters. Five trains stalled, one each at City Hall, Dhoby Ghaut, Ang Mo Kio, and Bishan stations, and one more along the stretch just before Somerset station. The cause for this second disruption was apparently similar to the earlier disruption: misalignment between the stalled trains' current collector shoes and the third rail.

Following the second incident, a complete check was conducted for the entire North-South-East West Line (NSEWL) and its operating fleet of trains. LTA and SMRT wanted to do everything possible to ensure that services would not be disrupted again. LTA and SMRT mobilised their technical and engineering staffs to work through the night of 17 December, and SMRT was able to fully resume service around noon on Sunday, 18 December.

As a result of the checks, the LTA and SMRT found 21 dislodged or missing claws. These claws secure the third rail to the support brackets, and when a few consecutive claws are dislodged, this may cause the third rail to sag. It becomes misaligned with the collector shoes on the trains passing these sections and it will damage or break off the collector shoes. This was likely the immediate cause of the incidents on both 15 and 17 December. However, many questions remain unanswered: Why did the claws dislodge? Why did it happen on such a scale and only along certain stretches of our trains on those two days? And why, after apparently fixing the problem on 15 December on the affected stretches, did train services run smoothly on 16 December, only to have the problem re-surface on 17 December in a different location? These are among the questions that the COI has to look into.

We suspected excessive vibrations from the running of the trains could be a factor for the claws to be dislodged. Therefore, as a precautionary measure, the LTA directed SMRT to impose a speed restriction of 40 kph, instead of the usual 80 kph, on trains running along the floating slab tracks. The floating slab tracks, or what are known as FSTs, are large concrete structures that are supported on bearings. They are designed to absorb vibrations from passing trains so that the surrounding buildings are not affected. Most of the damaged claws were found along the FST sections. SMRT also further secured the claws with cable ties after consulting the manufacturer.

The staffs of SMRT and LTA have worked extremely hard to deal with the disruptions and to stabilise the situation. They did so under significant time pressure and stress. And I know that Singaporeans would want to join me in expressing our sincere appreciation to them for their hard work. Let me also thank commuters who displayed tolerance and understanding, coping with the slightly degraded service levels by starting their journeys a little earlier and taking things in their stride. As of

today, all but one of the damaged trains have re-entered service, and SMRT is running more trains than before the incidents, because some of the 17 new trains that were recently delivered have entered service. The speed restriction is still in place on the FST stretches of the NSEWL and this has extended journeys by about two minutes. Since the two incidents, the SMRT has taken steps to secure all the claws along the NSEWL, both underground and aboveground, with cable-ties, as an interim measure to prevent claws from being dislodged while they work on a permanent solution. The SMRT has also stepped up inspections, including daily checks on the third rail throughout the network, concentrating particularly along the FST sections, to ensure that any signs of recurrence are picked up early and rectified. The condition of the train collector shoes is also checked daily during operational hours for any early sign of damage or abnormality, and also at the end of revenue service when the trains return to the depots to ensure the integrity of the system.

Column: 33

Since excessive vibration was identified as a possible contributing factor, as an added precaution, the SMRT went further to check other vulnerable structures in the tunnel that could be affected by extensive vibrations. They therefore engaged a Professional Engineer to inspect and confirm the infrastructure integrity of the tunnel fixtures and mountings, and I understand that no abnormalities were found after these inspections.

The incidents of 15 and 17 December affected more than 200,000 commuters. They suffered great frustration, inconvenience and distress. The execution of Emergency preparedness plans, especially for the first incident, ought to be significantly improved. SMRT could have better handled the evacuation of passengers in the stalled trains to reduce the sense of distress, and could have provided clearer and timelier information and instructions to the public, instead of leaving commuters confused and apprehensive in already disordered circumstances. That the two incidents have the same proximate cause and happened two days apart raises concerns about possible systemic shortcomings. I assure this House that the Government takes a very serious view of the incidents and the potential safety risk that this could pose to commuters, to passengers, which is why I convened a Committee of Inquiry (COI) to investigate the incidents.

The Committee comprises three capable and experienced members, chosen for their legal, operational and technical expertise. Under its terms of reference, the COI will conduct an independent investigation into both technical and non-technical aspects of the incidents on 15 and 17 December. The Committee will investigate the sequence of events leading to the disruptions, as well as establish the technical, systematic and other causes that may have contributed to the disruptions. Based on these findings, it will make recommendations to minimise the recurrence of similar incidents, as well as to improve the management of such incidents. A full report of the proceedings, findings and recommendations will be submitted upon completion of the investigation, and it will be made public. And I hope that this addresses Mr Cedric Foo's and Ms Sylvia Lim's questions on the composition and the terms of reference for the COI.

Some have also asked if the Committee should look into other service disruptions on other MRT lines. The extent and severity of the service disruptions on 15 and 17 December, and the potential safety risks that they posed are what warrant an independent inquiry into the causes of these two disruptions. The COI should focus on investigating the core issues related to the 15 and 17 December incidents, report on its findings and make their recommendations accordingly. However, if there are any previous incidents or events which are relevant or have contributed to the incidents of 15 and 17 December, the COI has the latitude and indeed the obligation to consider them. The Chairman of the COI, Mr Tan Siong Thye, has already stated that the Committee will take a comprehensive and systems approach in

its inquiry to thoroughly understand all the underlying causes, both technical and non-technical, that could have contributed to the problem. Er Dr Lee Bee Wah has asked about the reasons for the recent breakdowns. I urge Members to be patient and to give the COI time to conduct this investigation thoroughly because it is premature at this stage to draw definitive conclusions on the underlying reasons for these two MRT breakdowns at this stage. We should also avoid speculating on the reasons, as I think this will undermine the focus of the COI in dispassionately and objectively getting to the bottom of the issues.

Column: 34

Ms Sylvia Lim has also asked how the Committee will conduct its hearings. The hearings will be held in public, and interested parties and witnesses have been invited to contact the Committee's Secretary. The Committee will have its own independent investigation team to enable it to carry out primary fact-finding. This will allow it to do a totally independent investigation, without relying on LTA and SMRT's ongoing investigations. The Committee will also have the power to procure and receive evidence as it thinks necessary or desirable, and examine all such persons as witnesses in order to fulfil its terms of reference.

Apart from the COI's investigation, the LTA and SMRT have also started their own separate internal investigations. This is to be expected. Both parties clearly have the duty and responsibility to find out what went wrong, especially for those areas that they are accountable for, and to do so as quickly as possible. The SMRT, as a public transport operator, must ensure that it is able to operate a safe and reliable train service while LTA, as the regulator, is responsible for identifying any shortcomings on the part of the operator that may have led to the service disruption and will also have to see if there are useful lessons from these incidents to strengthen its own regulatory role. The COI, on the other hand, is an independent party appointed by MOT and will also look into the larger systems issues beyond that which SMRT and LTA will cover in their respective probes.

I would like to give a quick update to this House on the on-going investigation efforts. As vibrations within the train system appears to be a key issue contributing to the incidents in question, the SMRT engaged an overseas consultant to conduct a series of preliminary vibration testing on 22 December. This was primarily a scoping exercise, to provide data on the dynamic properties of the various track and train components. The results will enable the experts to develop a proper proposal for the conduct of a series of more detailed tests that will be carried out in the coming weeks. After that, the data will need to be analysed and interpreted and they may have to carry out further tests if necessary. As some of these activities must be carried out on the actual tracks and tunnels, the various investigating bodies will need to work through how best to do this while SMRT continues to operate the MRT services.

There have been questions raised about whether our MRT system has been strained by the increase in ridership over the last few years with trains becoming more crowded. Because the operators have injected an additional 2,000 weekly trips since 2008 to cater to the higher ridership, some have speculated that the higher intensity usage of our system may have resulted in the breakdowns. I would like to assure the House of the following: First, the additional trips added did not exceed the safe operating parameters of the system. Second, the LTA requires the operators to keep strictly to the maintenance regime prescribed by the manufacturers. I will say a little more about this later.

But, first, I want to respond to the question posed by Mr Gan Thiam Poh on whether the two-minute intervals are the minimum and safest margin for MRT trains to run during peak hours. The present signalling system on the NSEWL is designed to safely allow for minimum headways of 120 seconds. It is therefore technically feasible and safe for the operator to run trains at two-minute intervals during

peak hours. The additional trips that SMRT has been putting on are only for the periods where the train intervals were longer than two minutes previously. Where trains were already running at two-minute intervals, no further trips were added.

Column: 35

3.15 pm

The signalling system is designed to disallow trains from coming too close to the next train. And this is also the reason why, as we come closer to running at the minimum two-minute headways, that we see more occasions where trains have to stop mid-way between stations for a while before re-starting. This is because the train ahead that has stopped at the station is sometimes delayed from moving off on time because some commuters, for example, have tried to embark while the doors are closing.

Members have raised concerns about the adequacy of the current maintenance regime. Indeed, a strong maintenance regime must be in place to ensure that the system is safe and reliable. Under the SMRT's current maintenance regime, the company has been performing maintenance works and inspections based on the schedules recommended by the manufacturers. Notwithstanding this, the quality and adequacy of the maintenance regime, be it for preventive or corrective maintenance, are areas that will be closely scrutinised by the COI as well as the internal investigation teams set up by both SMRT and LTA.

Ms Foo Mee Har asked how the SMRT is held accountable for the maintenance of the rail system. The LTA, as a regulator, requires the operators to comply with their Operating Performance Standards, or what is known as the OPS. The OPS mandates the minimum service adequacy that the Operators must fulfil. If found in breach of the OPS, the operators can be penalised up to \$1 million per incident, taking into account the severity of the incident. Besides the OPS, the operators are required to submit their two-year maintenance plans to LTA for review, and LTA may ask the operators to adjust or to improve on the plans as necessary. But I should also point out that, even in the absence of the OPS, it would still be in the operators' interest to maintain the RTS system well as this would extend the operational life of the assets.

Mr Gerald Giam has asked if LTA has to date exercised its power to impose conditions relating to the appointment, re-appointment or removal of MRT operators' CEO, chairman or any of its directors, and about the criteria that LTA uses to decide when to impose such conditions. Decisions relating to the changes of these key appointments in the company are initiated by the company or, in the case of the chairman and directors, by the shareholders, and they cannot be unilaterally imposed by the LTA. However, under LTA's current licences, operators must seek LTA's approval for the appointment, re-appointment or removal of any director or the Chairman of its Board of Directors. While LTA has veto powers over the appointment of the operators' Board, these are generally intended to be used as a last resort against clearly unsuitable nominees, and to date, LTA has not found it necessary to exercise this veto power.

One of the questions that needs to be answered is whether the regulatory regime is sufficiently robust. Together with the COI's more holistic findings, the Government will thoroughly review the regulatory and penalty framework and its oversight over the operators' maintenance regimes to strengthen it where necessary.

Column: 36

We move on to emergency preparedness. Several Members, including Ms Foo Mee Har, Mr Gan

Thiam Poh, Er Dr Lee Bee Wah, Mr Low Thia Khiang and Ms Irene Ng have asked about the readiness of our system to respond to an emergency. Er Dr Lee Bee Wah has also asked specifically about the role of the SCDF in such incidents, and if the incidents have impacted the Government's planning for a terror attack on the train system. Let me say at the onset that these disruptions exposed gaps in emergency preparedness and crisis response and we need to do much better.

The current processes require that the operators work with LTA to come up with plans that will be activated based on various plausible scenarios. The operators are required to have a Rail Incident Management Plan (RIMP) that is activated in the event of a train service disruption. Under the RIMP, the operators are responsible to provide timely information and regular updates to the public and passengers, maintain train services where possible, carry out recovery of service and provide alternative services to stations that may be affected by the service disruption, including the timely activation of bus bridging services. The operators are also expected to have clear procedures for handling passengers in affected trains, including the "detrainment" of commuters onto the MRT tracks and the relevant safety precautions that have to put in place in such instances, such as turning off the electric power to relevant sections of the third rail to ensure commuter safety, and so on.

The LTA regularly reviews the operators' RIMP, and works with them on improvements to service recovery and incident management measures. Table-top exercises (TTXs) are conducted to check the crisis management procedures. And prior to the opening of a new line or section of a line, the LTA requires the operator to carry out a full-scale exercise involving first responders like the SCDF and the SPF, to ensure that coordination between the operator and first responders is smooth. The operator is required to validate the SOPs during these exercises, so that adjustments can be made if necessary. Where possible, grassroots organisations and school pupils are invited to participate in such exercises to improve the emergency readiness of residents.

I would like to assure the House that a Whole-Of-Government approach is adopted with regard to commuter safety on our public transport system, and the Police and SCDF are activated during major service disruptions. During the recent incidents, Police officers were promptly deployed to assist SMRT on various fronts, and SCDF officers were also deployed to help those in distress for the incident on 15 December. Aside from LTA-led safety exercises, the PTOs also participate in security exercises that are led by MHA at the national level. So in 2006, Exercise Northstar V was carried out with the public transport operators. The exercise simulated multiple terror attacks in train stations and tested out contingency plans and coordination among various stakeholders from the public, private and people sectors. Shortcomings in areas like incident management, crowd control and casualty evacuation were identified, and follow-up actions were taken to address these. More recently in 2009, as part of Exercise Northstar VII, a swarm attack by gunmen was also simulated at Raffles Place MRT station. Apart from conducting emergency preparedness exercises, the Public Transport Security Command, or what is known as TransCom, that was formed in August 2009 under the Singapore Police Force (SPF) provides dedicated resources to enhance the safety and security of the MRT and bus systems.

There are, nevertheless, limitations to such simulated exercises since these are often pre-planned and scripted with volunteers from grassroots organisations and schools as willing and psychologically prepared participants. The most realistic exercise would be an unannounced major simulated disruption that involves actual commuters during peak hours, but such exercises would significantly inconvenience many commuters. But there is much more that LTA and the operators can do to increase the realism and the effectiveness of the exercises that they do and to extract greater value from these exercises to improve the SOPs and communications plans to the commuters and the public. Future exercises would therefore be conducted using more challenging scenarios to test the readiness of the operators and

improve the multi-agency coordination needed to enhance emergency preparedness and crisis response. And I believe that this is something that the COI will be looking into as well.

Column: 37

Members may also like to know that we have taken some immediate measures to improve existing procedures. Even as the COI looks into these two incidents, I would like to assure the House that improvement measures have been initiated so that we are better prepared for a major train service disruption. I will speak about three areas in particular, with regard to communication with commuters, bus bridging and coordination between Government agencies and the operators in the event of a service disruption.

First, measures have been put in place to improve communication to in-train commuters and the general public in the event of a service breakdown. Changes have been implemented to enable the SMRT Operations Control Centre (OCC) to broadcast directly to the passengers on a stalled train. This will provide those most affected by any disruption with more timely and accurate updates. The LTA is also working with the operators on having emergency announcements made in other languages besides English in the event of a service disruption. The SMRT has also improved its detrainment procedures so that the decision to detrain can be taken more quickly, and it will reduce the time that commuters are cooped up in a stalled train. After the first incident, the SMRT has also set up a Twitter account to provide more timely information on service delays. And in addition to just using traditional media, the LTA and the operators are also exploring the use of mass SMS broadcasts to alert commuters to service disruptions.

The second area is on bus bridging. It has been observed that the activation of bus bridging services sometimes took too long, and encountered various execution and logistical problems. Since the incidents, the LTA has further reviewed SMRT and SBST's bus bridging plans to ensure that bus routing and passenger boarding and alighting points are updated, logical and sufficient to cater to the volume of passengers expected. On the ground, this would include the improvement of signage for evacuation routes and bus bridging points. In addition, pre-prepared instructions to drivers have been reviewed to ensure that they are clear and easily understood. And as an added assurance, the SMRT will deploy an officer with every bus convoy whose drivers may be unfamiliar with the route to guide them along.

As the regulator, the LTA is also working with both SMRT and SBST to improve contingency plans for train service disruptions, including a more integrated and holistic approach to incident management and service recovery. For example, instead of relying only on bridging shuttle bus services which could take some time to activate, the LTA is working with SMRT to allow for free travel on its bus services that serve SMRT stations where train services are disrupted, and they will explore extending this arrangement across both operators, so that affected commuters can continue their journeys on either operators' bus services for free regardless of which line is disrupted.

Column: 38

Thirdly, coordination among operators and agencies has been further enhanced. We have streamlined the communications protocol so that LTA, SPF and SCDF can be alerted more quickly, especially if assistance is required by the operator. In addition, the SCDF, LTA and Police are already reviewing and refining response protocols and emergency procedures together with the operators.

Finally, let me assure this House again that the safety of commuters is paramount. The rail system is the backbone of our public transport system. It carries millions of commuters each day, and its safety

and reliability must be ensured. We have taken a number of immediate measures after the two disruptions and we will continue to improve the MRT system to regain the confidence and trust of commuters. While we know that the claws were dislodged, we do not yet know why this happened. The COI will get to the bottom of this matter, we will get the problems fixed, we will improve the overall resilience and robustness of our public transport system and we will enhance our incident management capabilities. I seek Members' and the public's understanding and patience in the meantime. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Order. I propose to take the break now. Members may seek their clarifications after the break. I suspend the Sitting and will take the Chair again at 3.55 pm.

*Sitting accordingly suspended
at 3.35 pm until 3.55 pm.*

Sitting resumed at 3.55 pm.

[Mr Speaker in the Chair]

Disruption of MRT train services on 15 and 17 December 2011

Mr Cedric Foo Chee Keng (Pioneer) : Sir, I want to thank the Minister for his very long and indeed comprehensive statement regarding the questions that I and several of our Members have raised. I have some supplementary questions and clarifications.

First, whether the role of the regulator should be one of the terms of reference for the Committee of Inquiry (COI). Because if the COI is convened by the Minister for Transport and LTA comes under his purview, where does the role of the regulator come into play when the COI examines it and how independent would that assessment be? Secondly, how long will the COI take by the Minister's estimation and what does he think is a reasonable period for robust but timely inquiry results to be presented to this House?

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : Sir, I thank Mr Foo for his supplementary questions and clarifications. First of all, I believe that the COI, and I am confident that the COI, would do a very thorough job of this to look into not only the causes -- both technical and non-technical -- that relate to the disruptions, but also all other aspects that may allow us to do a much better job of maintaining the system as well as responding to such incidents. And certainly I would expect that they would take a look at the role of the regulator and, if they have opinions on the matter as to how the regulator can do a better job, as I have mentioned in the Statement that I have given earlier, I would expect the COI to put this forward in the recommendations.

Column: 39

The COI is not dependent on the LTA or on SMRT for the investigation. It has its own independent investigation arms, and that is why while it takes the reports from both the internal investigations conducted by the SMRT and LTA into consideration, it can go well beyond this and, in fact, it is, I am sure, going to direct its own independent investigation to look deeper into certain areas.

Secondly, on how long the COI and what is the reasonable period: I would rather not speculate on that at this point in time. But what we do expect, of course, is that at the end of it all it will be a very, very thorough study with the appropriate recommendations into the issues and how to prevent it from happening again, and what are the improvements that we need make. And we ought to give them the time that is needed in order for them to do a very thorough job of this, which is why it is important that

the operators, together with the regulator, even at this point in time, put into place certain improvements where it can – where they already know that there are certain weaknesses from observations arising from how these two incidents were managed. If there are improvements that ought to be made, well, we should not wait for the COI to finish its work. We ought to put them into practice, refine them if necessary and find other areas that we ought to further improve on.

3.59 pm

Ms Irene Ng Phek Hoong : Sir, there is a concern that SMRT might have been focusing more on maximising its profits by growing its retail business rather than on improving its performance, maintenance and service standards of the rail system. And that this emphasis has contributed to the recent lapses.

I have three supplementary questions. First, what measures are the Minister introducing to ensure that the public interest is always placed above that of commercial gain. Second, the Minister mentioned about reviewing the penalty framework. Can the Minister tell us whether heavy fines will be meted out as a punitive measure for the disruptions - large enough for the SMRT to feel the pinch – and the penalty framework reviewed so that the fines would be more effective as a deterrent? And my third point: can the Minister assure us that the new CEO of SMRT will have the requisite qualifications and experience in transport management to deliver a public transport system that Singaporeans can rely on and be confident of?

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank Ms Ng for her very probing questions. I think it would probably be remiss of me to affirm the Member's statement that they focus more on commercial rather than on maintenance. I have no basis for supporting such a hypothesis. What we do know is that they are required to maintain the trains and the systems in accordance with what the manufacturer recommends. And based on their own experience operating the trains and systems, to add on to what the manufacturer has recommended as well as to draw lessons from other regimes – best practices that other operators may be practising – in order to strengthen what they do here in Singapore.

Column: 40

On top of that, the LTA exercises oversight on this, so there is the Operating Performance Standards (OPS) that the LTA imposes on the operators of this system. This is the very minimum standard that they must meet, and it covers a variety of different areas including service availability, on-time performance, and so on and so forth. But there is also a part that is devoted to maintenance and safety, and the maintenance plans are put to LTA for their review and if LTA deems that there is more that needs to be done, then LTA will work together with the operator on these specific areas.

On heavy fines, I would not like to speculate at this point of time what the fines should be for these two incidents because, obviously, it needs to be properly investigated and we need to, first of all, understand the underlying causes and what are some of the contributory areas that may have resulted into the two severe incidents.

The last non security-related incident was in January 2008 where one of the locomotives stalled on the tracks and it disrupted operations, I believe, for about seven hours. The fine, then, the largest in history so far, was above \$300,000. So we would take some of that into consideration as well – past performances and relative benchmarks, such as the one that I have just mentioned, and depending on the findings of the COI, we will then determine the penalty accordingly.

I would also like to add that this does not come out of commuters' fares because there is always the

concern that the greater the penalty you impose on the operator, the more of it is passed on to the commuters. The fare formula, as we are aware, does not quite operate that way. The fare formula really is a combination of the inflation as well as the CPI as well as the wage growth, the average of that with a productivity dividend of 1.5% that we extract from the operators. And that is the basis for which the PTC would subsequently determine the fare formula for the following year. So penalties and fines and all that have no bearing on the setting of fares for the years to come. I want to assure Members of that as well.

The final point on the new CEO. I think it is a matter that is best left to the Board to work on. I know that they have one of the Directors with very strong engineering experience from Shell, Mr Tan Ek Kia, stepping in on an interim basis at this point in time while the search for a CEO is going on. We ought to give SMRT the time and space to do a proper search for the next CEO.

4.06 pm

Mr Dr Lee Bee Wah (Nee Soon) : Sir, I would like to ask three supplementary questions to the Minister. I think this whole spate of breakdowns not only revealed the gaps in an emergency preparedness and crisis response, it also reveals the seriousness in the lack of maintenance. I think a lot of people are thinking that our train system is breaking down part by part. I would like to ask the Minister: are you happy with the maintenance budget that is set aside by the PTO in this case, SMRT? Question two: is LTA looking into any worst case possible? I was told that the first batch of trains arrived in Singapore 24 years ago – 66 of them – have already outlived their lifespan. And in those trains, there are a lot of electronic parts which are all obsolete and it could be a time bomb. I hope that LTA will look into this very seriously. And the third question is: it looks like we cannot just depend on the train system. Is LTA looking into parallel bus systems?

Column: 41

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : Sir, to answer this set of questions, I should bring my file to share some data with Members. Let me deal with the maintenance issues. You see, we do not determine the maintenance budgets. We look at what is the outcome and if we are satisfied with the outcome. I asked for some data on the number of incidents and I would just confine it to giving Members some data on the North-South-East-West line. I do not want to put it into the Statement because, as Mr Foo said, it is already long enough. So I thought I would just share it with you here.

You see, LTA tracks the number of breakdowns above a 10-minute delay for peak hours; above 15 minutes for off-peak. They also, of course, have data going down to five-minute and two-minute disruptions. The data is for 2007 until November 2011. I do not have the full year's data but essentially, this is it. It is on incidents per 100,000 kilometres (km) because obviously, if you have a longer network, you are running more trains, you have to expect that there would be more breakdowns. Hence, over the years, we have indeed been running more trips. We have indeed been extending our networks so you would expect that there are also more disruptions. Hence, the right thing to do and is indeed the norm for operators in other regimes to normalise this to 100,000 km.

Broadly, what it shows is that actually, in terms of the severe incidents above 30-minute disruptions, that has come down in absolute number of disruptions from seven in 2007 to two in 2011. Obviously, this is prior to the two incidents. In terms of incidents per 100,000 km, that has come down from 0.05 to 0.03. Part of the reason why it has come down is because we had, in the earlier years, a number of track intrusions. The track intrusions actually disrupted the smooth running of the trains quite a bit. We see a similar pattern of decreasing number of incidents reported and monitored by the LTA, the track

intrusions. For incidents that caused greater than 10-minute delay, there is also a decrease from 30 in 2007, it went up to 37 in 2008 and thereafter, it came down – last year, it was 21 until November. And likewise, measured across per 100,000 km, it came down. Where there are slight increases in the trend of disruptions are those that are of five-minute delay – so five to 10 minutes – that has gone up. Absolute numbers – in 2007, it was 213 incidents; and 2011, for the eleven months, it was about 271 incidents. So we are really roughly talking about almost an incident a day for that kind of disruption. And measured against per 100,000 km, it had also gone up from 1.65 to 1.8 – and these are for more than five minutes.

LTA is looking into this together the operators to try and understand whether there are some underlying causes that affect the trains causing delays of more than five minutes and to see whether we can improve the maintenance regime or whatever may be the cause of this.

On old trains, I would like to correct that misimpression because what happens is that, I believe after every 15 years, the trains undergo a service life extension programme. It is not quite a mid-life upgrade because we know of other regimes where they have gone through two such extensions. So our trains have gone through a service life extension programme where basically, they do what is necessary in order to continue to keep the trains running at a very performance level.

The third thing is on parallel buses versus trains. Today, we have two parallel bus services, one operated by SBST, the other operated by SMRT. I know there have been calls for more of these parallel bus services and indeed, we are thinking what more can be done, particularly when we are able to bring in more buses into the system. But I would say that actually, if you look at the use of these two services, it has been disappointing because people tend to gravitate towards the trains rather than to the buses for a variety of reasons. It is just that it is less consistent and less reliable in terms of the kind of timings that you would expect. The most telling was on Sunday morning. Remember we had that disruption on Saturday. At the end of the operating hours on Saturday, we shut down the system for an extended maintenance and checks. We only fully resumed service on Sunday, 18 December by about noon. The bus bridging service dragged on to about two o'clock. It was free. So there was free bus bridging parallel to the MRT lines on a Sunday mid-day versus paid train services. As soon as the trains were running, everybody shifted to the trains. So we continued running the buses but you could see the behavioural patterns.

Column: 42

So I would say that, while we want to look into how we can provide more parallel services particularly during the peak hours, I am mindful that based on the two services that we run today, it really has pretty low ridership. They have not been successful and the experience on Sunday showing demand between paid MRT services and free bus bridging services was also quite telling.

4.12 pm

Mr Low Thia Khiang (Aljunied) : Sir, I noted the Minister's admission that there is a gap in emergency response and would look into it. I am happy to note that. There are some clarifications I would like to seek. First of all, what is the role of Government in an emergency situation involving public service such as SMRT which is essentially a private company? Secondly, who should assess and determine whether a particular situation like service disruption on 15 December is indeed an emergency situation whereby the SOP involving such a situation is activated? Thirdly, whether the operator, in this case, SMRT, by creating a situation due to whatever situation that they have inside, has caused the Government agencies to provide the service which cost Government expenditure. And whether this

company which is a private company, answerable to shareholders, should be made to pay for the services provided by the Government?

Sir, in the Minister's Statement, he mentioned that 17 new trains have been put into service. I would like to know where these train cars come from. Who are the manufacturers and whether or not these new train cars may indeed cause excessive vibrations which are probably causing the problems that we face today?

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : Mr Speaker, Sir, let me thank the Member for some very good questions. On the way of the Government in emergency situations, let us stick to transport-related incidents. If they are security-related, for example, if it is a terrorist incident and so on, then it comes under the charge of the Police Force. For disruptions of the nature that we encountered on 15 and 17 December, it comes under the responsibility of the operator who is the domain owner of the situation. But it does not mean that they handle these themselves because there is, as I have said, a Rail Incident Management Plan (RIMP) where they are required to assess, decide on "detrainment" procedures, communications and so on, and also assess whether there is a necessity to call for additional help. So, in this case, the Police as well as the SCDF were activated. Upon activation, if I can recall correctly, the Police arrived at Somerset Station within about 20 minutes or so. The SCDF arrived at Somerset Station -- because that was where the call came from, where it all started -- within about 12 minutes. And thereafter, the Government agencies actually put in more resources, including activating their personnel for crowd control as the crowd that needed bus bridging services grew greater.

Column: 43

Whether they should pay for services by the Government: I think this is a completely different issue altogether and I think it is not appropriate for me to say that as a result of this incident, we establish a new precedent where any private company that draws on Government services in an emergency must be required to pay for it. I think where private entities, commercial bodies draw on Government resources, for example, if they were to require us to help them to do a study as they expand overseas or whatever, they pay. They pay the full cost plus a little bit more. That is already a given.

But where it is emergency services where you activate the ambulance, the Police or the fire brigade, I am not so sure that that ought to be the principle that we adopt.

On the 17 new trains, these are Kawasaki trains that were assembled in China and delivered to us. The first five of the 22 actually came in May, and 17 were delivered, I believe, from October/November onwards. We have been accepting them into service. Hence, that was also the reason why despite the loss of that one train -- which we were not yet able to complete the repairs -- SMRT was actually able to introduce more trains to run the system.

Did they cause excessive vibrations? We do not know. It is something that we would need to get to the root of it. There are four classes of trains now in the system. We bought them at different times. The latest two generations were from Kawasaki. These trains are about five tonnes heavier than the other trains; and each train is about 220-plus tonnes, so the new ones are five tonnes heavier each. If you say that you run it at full load, I do not know, maybe 1,400 or 1,500 passengers at about 65 kg each, that would be about another 100 tonnes. So, the difference is about five tonnes over, maybe, 320 tonnes. Did they contribute, and to what degree did they contribute, to the excessive vibrations? We do not know yet. We have asked this question. The academics have told us that vibration is, as they always say, quite complicated. It is speed, it is mass. It is whether there are floating slab tracks or concrete tracks. Is it round the curves or straight? So there is a variety of different possible factors that they need to input

into the so-called “equation”, which is why SMRT brought an expert in to do a scoping exercise, to come up with a detailed plan to measure the different trains, different speeds, different places. We will, then, analyse the results, and we will know better thereafter.

4.16 pm

Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song : I thank the Minister for his statement.

I have one supplementary question. Why is the COI that he appointed only going to cover the disruptions on 15 and 17 December? As the Minister has said earlier, there were actually 269 other disruptions or instances lasting more than five minutes that happened last year. By limiting the inquiry to just the incidents on 15 and 17 December, is the Government omitting the major problems – whether systematic or otherwise – that may have been the cause of the other incidents?

Column: 44

I understand that LTA would be investigating the other incidents, as the Minister mentioned just now. But is it not necessary to have an independent panel or committee to be investigating these as well?

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : Convening the COI is a serious matter. The last time the transport arena had to convene a COI was back in April 2004 during the Nicoll Highway incident. You know that when you bring the COI together, it is really to take a very, very careful detailed look at very serious disruptions.

The “ordinary” disruptions – if I can call them that, that is, the 5-minute, 10-minute or 30-minutes disruptions – I think you would leave it to both the operator as well as LTA to investigate thoroughly and to draw lessons as to whether there are systemic causes, what are the issues involved as well as to make the improvements needed. I did also say in the Statement that the COI could and should look at other factors that may have contributed to what happened on 15 and 17 December.

My personal belief is that before any significant incident happens, there is possibly a series of little incidents that if we had been monitoring these carefully over time, taking the lessons learned, doing the necessary improvements and changes, may have prevented them. I speak from experience because, having served 20 years in the Navy, I know that that is so when we track it back. So while the COI focuses on what happened on 15 and 17 December, both from the technical and non-technical aspects, and if it deems it necessary, for example, it would look at the issue of the claws – how many claws were dislodged in the past, what did you do with regard to such claws, and so on and so forth. It need not be constrained as to what actually happened and the approximate causes for the 15 and 17 December. If it deems it necessary, it can go beyond that to look at the events as well as the other factors. It is actually quite a broad scope. But I would also add that I think it is not possible nor is it necessary for us to convene a COI for every five-minute disruption to the train system.

4.19 pm

Ms Tin Pei Ling (Marine Parade) : I thank the Minister for the very comprehensive Statement. I also find it very assuring that the Government is looking very seriously into the possibilities of terror attacks and therefore planning for such emergencies.

But, frankly, I am also a little disappointed that the SMRT, since this is under its purview, has not been able to anticipate or prepare for emergency scenarios like those that had happened in December, since those would have been the more likely scenarios, especially in terms of train operations, and we see it everywhere in other countries as well.

I felt that in the Minister's Statement, the emphasis on having a robust maintenance could not have been more important and more emphasised, and therefore it brings me to ask this question: whether the Ministry will consider requiring service and technical audits on a regular or half-yearly basis. If so, would the Ministry consider publishing such results so that public confidence could be restored? This would be a suggestion that I hope the Ministry could perhaps consider, in addition to the investigation and reports that the COI would be putting together. I think, in one night, if 61 rail defects and 13 faulty trains were uncovered, this could not have happened overnight. If we could put in such measures on a more regular basis, perhaps such disruptions could be better mitigated.

Column: 45

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : Thank you for the suggestion. I really do not want to speculate at this point as to what were the underlying causes. We know that the claws dislodged. The question we need to ask is: Could it have been picked up? Could something have been done about it before the two incidents happened? Would a more stringent regulatory and audit regime have helped? These are areas that we do not quite know at this point in time, and I dare say that I would not want to add to the speculation, but I would allow the COI to do its job. If the COI deems that we really need to strengthen the regulatory and audit regime, and for LTA to pay more attention to these areas, we would certainly want to take that on board.

4.22 pm

Mr Yaw Shin Leong (Hougang) : Sir, I thank the Minister for the Statement. I just have one clarification. Why do the MRT train windows not have emergency ventilation panels built in, so that commuters can manually open them in the event of an emergency like this one, or, say, if there is a chemical attack on the trains? The Hong Kong MTR has such panels in every train window which can be pulled open easily in the event of an emergency. Should this not have been part of the design specification of the trains? Is LTA intending to make this feature a requirement in all future train deliveries, including the 17 Kawasaki trains? And will it modify existing trains to implement this feature?

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : I thank Mr Yaw for that question. What we have today is emergency power supply on board that will allow the emergency systems not the full system, but emergency lighting, ventilation and so on -- for up to 45 minutes. These are tested regularly -- I have checked with them -- and they should last for up to 45 minutes. His point about whether we should have windows that can be opened in the event of a chemical attack and so on, I hesitate to say "yes", because sometimes that can actually be more dangerous than it would otherwise be if you have them closed. Because in a chemical attack, the chemical agents are actually outside in the tunnels or whatever it is. You would want to try and keep the train cars sealed for as long as possible.

I am not an expert in this matter as to whether you would want to have the windows open where people under all circumstances would be prepared to just pull open the windows, when sometimes it may be actually a greater danger to them. So, where necessary, I would want to take a much more careful look at this. But whether the emergency power supply of 45 minutes is doing what it is supposed to do, and whether it is sufficient, I would want to take a more careful look into that.

4.24 pm

Dr Janil Puthuchery (Pasir Ris-Punggol) : Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the Minister two questions. Given that our rail network is probably increasing in length and almost certainly in

complexity, the absolute number of disruptions may increase even as the relative number reduces. Does LTA audit variance from the various emergency plans that the operators put up, such as the RIMP that he described? If not, why not? If so, would they consider using variance from the proposed plans as part of a performance indicator? So, between the regulator and the operator, if they come up with an emergency preparedness plan, does LTA investigate whether the plan that was proposed and was approved, is actually the plan that was carried out in an emergency situation? And if not, why was that not measured? If it is measured, could that variance from the plan be used as the performance indicator to incentivise the operator to put up realistic plans and carry out those plans properly?

Column: 46

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : Mr Speaker, let me thank Dr Janil for a very good question. Yes, indeed, we do audit the variance. So, whether it is in terms of timings for the activation of the different protocols – activation, indeed, of the RIMP itself – whether the bus-bridging service is activated in a sufficiently timely manner, the number of buses and so on, it is certainly so. It is the outcomes and whether the operators are able to meet the outcomes expected of them.

4.26 pm

Dr Lim Wee Kiak : Sir, I would like to ask the Minister about benchmarking ourselves against other countries' MRT system, like Hong Kong MTR, as well as the Tokyo system versus New York and London systems. What are their breakdown rates like compared to ours?

The second question I would like to ask is this. During the PTC reviews, whenever the public transport operator requests for a fare increase, are these breakdown rates computed into the formula? This means that if there are more breakdowns, why do we let them have a chance to have a fare increase? Commuters have been complaining that while fares go up, the quality of service may not measure up.

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : I thank the Member for that question. I actually do not have the detailed data for some of these other regimes. I know that in terms of availability as well as service standards, we are generally comparable if not better than many of them. We have a little bit more data on fares, but since that is not question that the Member raised, I would not want to share that data right now. But indeed we do try and get as much information as possible, as well as the problems they are encountering and sharing the problems that we encounter to try, overall, for everyone to have a more robust operating regime.

On fare formula: the fare formula is due for review in 2012 for implementation in 2013. I do not want to speculate at this point in time whether and how the fare formula for the coming years may change. You know what the fare formula entails today. When we assemble the team to let them take a review of the fare formula, they will have sufficient room to consider then all the necessary factors that may have to go into the new fare formula.

4.28 pm

Er Dr Lee Bee Wah : Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Minister mentioned earlier about the first batch of train being sent for service life extension. May I ask Minister what is that? What is being done to the train and is this a common practice? How long is the extension of the life span of the train? Why is it that it is not replaced by new trains? And if it is replaced by a new train, how much will it cost SMRT? Does SMRT have sufficient funds to replace new trains?

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : Well, I do not have all the details as to exactly what they do. I do know that for example in London, I was told that trains have gone into the third cycle of extension. So, roughly about average 15 years after you take over the trains, you do a major improvement to them and then the trains come out. Through the course of the 15 years, you continue to improve on the trains. These are smaller maintenance regimes. Every 15 years you take the trains in for an extended period of time and we do what is necessary.

Column: 47

Why not replace them with new trains? We have added 22 new trains just over the course of this year. There is another lot of new trains coming in, in 2014. I cannot recall the number but together, what we are getting this year plus the new trains in 2014, would be about 25% of the total capacity for the Compass lines.

My philosophy and I think it is a philosophy that we all share is: we need to be prudent in the use of funds, because at the end of the day, who will ultimately bear the costs, even if it is paid for by the Government? Ultimately, it goes back to the tax-payers. Whether they pay for it through taxes, whether it is done through fares, we want to be as fiscally prudent as we possibly can. We build what needs to be built. Certainly, \$60 billion over 10 years, is already a lot of money to build the new lines, the Downtown Lines, the Thomson Line and so on. New trains are being added to the North-East line, to the Circle Line as well as – where Mr Liang Eng Hwa’s constituency is – Bukit Panjang LRT.

So, there is significant expenditure. It is important for us even while we spend billions of dollars to also be counting the millions of dollars that each new train would cost. If we can continue to prolong the life of each train without making it unsafe or degrading its performance, then I think it is important for us to do so.

4.31 pm

Assoc Prof Fatimah Lateef : Two issues, Sir. One, can I ask the Minister for his definition of train intrusions because I am not very clear on what that term actually means? Secondly, it is pertaining to the gaps in the emergency preparedness. I know that we conduct exercises every year, almost. One example is the North-Star exercise where multi-agencies are involved. The basic fundamental that we practise during these exercises are crowd-control, evacuations and how to handle emergencies, including emergency communications. So, to say that there are lapses in such fundamental issues gives me certain concerns. I wonder whether we should tailor future exercises accordingly; both in simulated as well as the Minister mentioned unsimulated situations. Also, perhaps, as he mentioned, we should use volunteers, NSmen, school students and grassroots leaders as “casualties” in such exercises. Perhaps we could consider opening these up to Singaporeans to volunteer so that they actually get the real feel and they know exactly what to do in emergency situations.

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : On intrusions: they are not “train intrusions”, they are “track intrusions”. “Train intrusions”, I think, would refer to the graffiti and all. I was talking about track intrusions and they would disrupt services for perhaps more than 30 minutes while we carry out the evacuation. There are the voluntary and the involuntary track intrusions, which is why we build the half-height platform doors along the main lines.

On training exercises, I fully appreciate the point that Member Dr Fatimah has raised and I share the disappointment that, despite table-top exercises and full troop exercises, that the execution of the emergency plans, leave much to be desired. My take is this: there is a difference when you do pre-planned and scripted exercises, where the participants are psychologically prepared and they know what

is going to come next. And you assemble, often is the case, the most prepared team to take part in the exercise. Yes, it helps when the officers step through the procedures and sometimes you find shortcomings in the procedures. But in terms of the realism, it is not there. In terms of actually testing whoever ought to be tested, you may not be testing the right people. Therefore, the most realistic exercises ought to be the unannounced, unscripted ones, where you allow a certain degree of free play, which means that if you really want that degree of realism, you ought to be conducting exercises on one or a few of your trains during, say, a Friday evening peak hour. But the inconvenience to commuters would be unimaginable. It would be on a scale or close to the scale of the disruptions that we saw on 15 and 17 December. I do not suggest that we go in that direction. I merely said that we ought to improve on the way we conduct our exercises today to inject a greater degree of realism so that people are, to some extent, caught off guard. So, you are able to really assess how prepared they are and how quickly they can respond to it. We will have to think through how this is best done, but I do not think it is possible to spring such surprises on Singaporeans without any proper announcement.

Column: 48

With regard to opening up spots for such exercises to all Singaporeans: it is certainly something that we will consider so that it will only the grassroots nor only school students that would be involved, but whoever who would like to participate and get a sense of what is required and be more prepared to respond to an emergency, is something that we can consider.

4.35 pm

Mr Pritam Singh (Aljunied) : I would like to thank the Minister for his reply. Incidents do happen and I am glad the Minister has proceeded to give a lengthy response to this House. I am concerned about the public's cynicism about exercises like the North-Star series. To renew public's confidence, can I request the Minister to consider getting the regulator, in this case, LTA to underwrite and approve all safety and communication-related SOPs implemented by the operator in future, as it does appear to be the case that this was where the SMRT's response was indeed very woeful? This is also short of springing surprises on Singaporeans with unannounced exercises which I do not think is realistic.

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : Sir, I thank the Member for understanding that it is not quite possible to do exercises in that manner. Today, the role of the regulator with regard to the operator's plans, for example, their Rail Incident Management Plan (RIMP), is that the operator submits this plan to the LTA for review. It is not a formal approval but they sit together, they run through the plans, they make sure that actually the parameters are set up quite clearly and then, as Dr Janil had asked earlier, we would hold them to it so that when there is a need to operationalise or to execute such plans, we are able to assess the variants and whether they have conformed to the plans. This takes place not only for incidents but also for their safety and maintenance plans as well.

4.37 pm

Mr Gan Thiam Poh (Pasir Ris-Punggol) : Sir, for any incident or accident, we should be more concerned about human safety. Can Minister assure the House that the operator will ensure that the accident that happened in China, where there was a collision, will never happen in our train system, even if our signalling system has failed?

Column: 49

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : Sir, I think the Member will appreciate and understand that it is never possible to give an iron-clad guarantee on such matters, but let me assure him that we looked very carefully at

what happened in China. We wanted to do everything possible to make sure that the signalling equipment in Singapore will, as best as we can do so, not be subject to what happened there.

On signalling: indeed sometimes we hear of signalling faults being announced during a disruption. There are two types of signalling faults. One is on board the train and the other one is track-side. When you have an on board the train signalling fault, the train cannot carry on its operations. It has to be either pushed or hauled to the depot or to a siding. When you have a track side signalling fault, the trains can continue to operate but in manual mode. And in manual mode, the driver takes over control of the trains, and of course, we reduce the speed of the train and the speed instead of at 80km/hour, you will run it to as slow as 15km/hour and you would extend the headways between the trains. So, it is a degraded service. So, for track side signalling faults, you can continue with some degraded mode of operation, but if it is a train signalling fault, you would have to pull that train out before you can resume service. Or you can put the train to the side before you can resume service.

The point about commuter safety is one that we take absolutely seriously. And so, in the OPS, the Operating Performance Standards, we allow certain disruptions, certain breakdowns and all, but no fires on board, no fatalities. Those are very, very stringently spelt out. And I assure you, I assure the House and the public, that out of all this investigations, out of the work that the COI is going to do and the recommendations that they would put forward that we would take on board. We will continue to improve on what we have – just as we have made some immediate improvements. We will continue on them and help the public restore and regain confidence in the MRT system.

4.40 pm

Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap (Aljunied) : Sir, I would like to ask the Minister, regarding the driverless trains on the Circle Line, what is the Standard Operating Procedure for responding to train emergencies? A least now, for the NEL, there is still a staff member on each train so he or she could take control of the emergency situation. But for the City Line, they do not have any, I believe, operator so what should the SOP be?

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : Mr Speaker, let me thank the Member for a very good question. The driverless trains are designed so that in the event of an emergency, as much as possible, they would be able to coast to the next station. So that is how the parameters are designed and that is how the emergency power is designed. We have people at every station and so, in the event that there is a need to, they would have people from the stations come to provide support to the trains.

4.41 pm

Column: 50

Mrs Lina Chiam : Thank you, Sir. At the time of the disruption of the MRT trains, passengers left the trains and walked through tunnels along the railway tracks to reach their destinations. May I clarify with the Minister, whether the railway tracks were electrified? And if they were electrified, did they pose a danger to these commuters? Secondly, will the Committee assure that the next CEO that will be appointed will not be holding numerous portfolios as this will deter the work efficiency? Can the Minister clarify?

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : On detrainment between stations, this is not the first choice. The first choice is actually to bring a stalled train into a station. So you either have another train to pull it or push it so that the passengers can actually disembark from the train at the station. That is always the preferred mode of evacuating passengers. Hence, when you take a decision to detrain them and have them walk along the

tracks, it will take a certain amount of time before that decision is made because you would want to avoid exposing passengers to such conditions.

Secondly, there is a very strict safety protocol that you have to follow before such passengers are allowed onto the tracks. One of the steps is to make sure that the electricity supply is shut off, the third rail is de-energised – just to mention some considerations – before the passengers are allowed to detrain and walk on the tracks.

I am not so sure I follow the Member's point about CEOs holding numerous portfolios, but that is something that is best determined by the Boards who are responsible for appointing such CEOs as well as for their overall performance.

4.43 pm

Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng : Thank you, Sir. I also thank the Minister for a very comprehensive statement. I would like to ask the Minister for the background leading to the resignation of SMRT's CEO, Ms Saw. May I find out if the resignation should happen after the completion of the investigation by the COI, or at least until the next CEO is identified and there is a proper handover? Or is this just a populist decision to placate the public by whomever who makes the decision? And whether the resignation of the CEO right now is truly a better solution for the operator?

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : Let me again thank the Member for the supplementary question. It is a good question to ask, except that I do not have the answer because this is not something that is determined by MOT or even LTA. As I have mentioned in my reply just now, the operator runs its appointments of Chairman, Directors and so on past the LTA, but we have never vetoed any such appointments. Certainly, the performance of the CEO is something that the Board decides on. Whether she resigns now or why she has to resign and so on, that is an internal SMRT matter.

I know as much as what I have read in the press, which is that she was already contemplating and there was some discussion about her leaving the company because she has already done nine years. 2012 would have been her tenth year and that is a pretty long time in one particular organisation. So even prior to the incidents, there was already some ongoing discussion. What I do know is that while having no executive role in the organisation, she will stay on until the investigations are completed so that she is able to provide her perspectives and inputs to the investigations both within the SMRT as well as by the COI.

Column: 51

4.46 pm

Mr Cedric Foo Chee Keng : Sir, it was good to hear the Minister reiterating that commuter safety is of paramount importance for the COI to look into. I would also like to ask Minister if he agrees that the independence of the COI is also equally important so that the public's confidence in the findings of the COI, when they are presented to the House, is not undermined. Would the Minister share with us his thinking behind the choice of the Chairman in the Chief District Judge? He is a learned judge. Is he very senior? Why did the Minister agree with that selection and the selection of the members within his Committee?

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : I want to thank the Member for that supplementary question. I have absolutely no doubt that the COI is an independent one. It is set up that way. They will have an independent investigation body. MHA has agreed that the CID will be their investigation arm, not because we

consider that there is a criminal liability or such like. It is just that the CID has very good investigative skills. They are totally separate from the parties that are involved in the incidents, and they will be the primary investigation arm for the COI.

Why these three gentlemen? Mr Tan Siong Thye is the Chief District Judge of the Subordinate Courts, the No. 1, the best man. The Inquiries Act stated that one member must be legally trained. I consulted and took views from different people. He was at the top of the list - absolutely no question whatsoever about his capabilities, integrity, etc. The fact that he is a public transport commuter and has been so regularly over the last 10 years was a real bonus. It was not a key consideration. To me, it was a bonus. Having interacted with him, I have absolute trust in his ability to get to the bottom of the issues.

Professor Lim Mong King, very learned. Expertise, of course, he is an engineer. He was Dean of the Engineering School, Deputy President of NTU, so he is a very respected, learned gentleman. He has got expertise in vibration. He has done work on this, and this is an area that we are, of course, very much interested in. He has also had the benefit of sitting on a couple of COIs in the past dealing with shipyard fires. We thought that that was going to be useful because he would understand what really needs to be done to get to the bottom of it.

Mr Soh Wai Wah, now Director of Prisons, was for many years in the Police Force as their Operations Head, the G3 of the Police Force. He was involved in planning many big events, including crisis management, dealing with incidents, etc. Prior to that, he was also involved in incidents like the Hotel New World collapse, etc.

So my feel is that we were looking for different expertise: legal, engineering and technical, as well as operational expertise. We wanted people who really have a great deal of experience and have much to contribute to the COI, able to work well as a team. After we have decided on Chairman Tan Siong Thye, I discussed with him the other two members to make sure that he was comfortable working together as a team because they will all have to support one another and cover the areas together. That was how it was assembled. Why did we choose those people that we did? There were, of course, a number of other prominent names that we considered. Some of them whom we looked at are already doing work with SMRT, LTA, MOT, and so we had to not allow some of these very capable individuals to be part of the COI. Professor Lim Mong King, equally capable, fortunately was not doing work for us at this point in time. Hence, the independence of the individuals of the team was considered as well.

Column: 52

4.51 pm

Ms Irene Ng Phek Hoong : Sir, I am surprised that the Minister does not have details of the rate of disruptions of the train systems in other developed cities. This question is actually also in my PQ in the Order Paper. Without this data, how can the Minister and MOT, as regulator, determine what is the acceptable level of disruptions in Singapore?

Can I also ask the Minister what would he consider as an acceptable level of train disruptions in Singapore? Related to this is the question of managing the expectations of commuters. As other Members have mentioned, incidents do happen, and for some of us who have travelled abroad - for instance, I have travelled in the Tube in London - train disruptions are not irregular. They are pretty common, but the commuters take it in their stride perhaps because they are quite used to such disruptions, or perhaps their alternative arrangements are adequate, or perhaps because of their culture. But in Singapore, can I ask the Minister how he assesses the response of the commuters in such emergencies, and whether he could set a certain benchmark that is tagged to the train systems of

developed cities on what is the acceptable rate of train disruptions?

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : Sir, I should, of course, get back to the Member on the details of the numbers in terms of disruptions. What we measure is service availability, that is, the ability of the operator to meet what he sets out to do in the schedule. The standard that we set for ourselves is 98%. The standard that is achieved by the operators is 99.9%-plus. When we look at this indicator, it is comparable and is actually slightly better than what we see in other regimes, including Hong Kong and so on.

As for the UK system, I do not think it is fair for me to comment on their rate of disruptions. It is more anecdotal. I do not have the figures at hand. The UK system is somewhat different from ours. Transport for London is publicly owned. Their fare system again is different from ours. It is more expensive. How they set it is sort of CPI plus 2%, which is the fare increase that they allowed for the last few years and going forward. The advantage of the London system, if you ask me, is that while I do not know of them providing bus bridging services in the event of a disruption, what happens is that the network is very dense because they have had more than a hundred years to build this up. Hence, if you have the Circle Line or the Jubilee Line being disrupted, the commuters would just move on and walk 500-700 metres to the next station, do a bypass and find an alternative way to get to their destination.

The fact that disruptions, as the Member puts it in her own words, “happen so often”, and whether this has conditioned their commuters, I would rather that this not be the case in Singapore. I would rather it be that disruptions are somewhat rare and that commuters express a certain amount of unhappiness even as they do understand that it would not be possible for it to run at 100% all the time, every day, across the entire year because no amount of expenditure or redundancy is going to give you 100%. I think commuters in Singapore understand this. What they need is for more timely and accurate information to be given to them so that they can say, “All right, let me try and do something else. Let me not go to the station, let me take a bus or walk somewhere else and take the Circle Line instead of the Compass lines.” We need to make that available to our commuters.

I would rather ours be a situation where the disruptions, particularly the major disruptions that will require us to close stretches of the line, are so rare that when it happens it causes a great amount of unhappiness. And we ought to take these matters seriously, get to the root of it and minimise it as much as possible so that we continue to keep our standards high.

Column: 53

4.56 pm

Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar (Ang Mo Kio) : I thank the Minister for taking the time to patiently answer all the questions. Are there external operators or contractors who carry out maintenance works on trains and tracks other than SMRT personnel, in order to provide that additional layer of checks and balances? Would the Ministry consider getting other private train operators to manage our train system in the light of numerous train disruptions under the SMRT?

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : Sir, I thank the Member for the two supplementary questions. Certainly, there are external personnel because I have seen them myself. I was down there on Boxing Day at about 3.30 in the morning, just to get a feel of what it is that they do and to talk to their people. Certainly, they bring in people from outside of SMRT to help them in some of the work, especially the heavy lifting. But they assured me that the man in charge of the entire team is from the SMRT and he is responsible for making sure that the track is ready for works to take place, that the works are done according to what is required, that they clear up and prepare the tracks for operations when they resume. So, yes,

certainly so, but they are under the charge of SMRT personnel.

Today, we are moving to a new rail financing framework. The Downtown Line that we put up for tender last year was the first of these lines under this framework and it was a competitive bid between SMRT and SBST -- just the two of them. This is the first time that is happening. At another occasion, I will speak more on it and reiterate the rationale as well as the benefits of why we are doing this. In time to come, gradually, all the new lines and even the existing lines will come under this competitive bidding framework by the operators. I do not preclude the possibility that one day, when we are a lot more familiar and comfortable with this new framework that we will open it up to other operators who are suitably qualified and experienced to participate in such tenders.

Mr Speaker : One last question by Mr Desmond Lee.

Mr Desmond Lee : Thank you, Mr Speaker. As I spoke to community leaders, grassroots leaders and residents about the SMRT incident to get their views of what happened, they compared SMRT's and the public's response to this incident with the response they see in other countries. When the earthquakes struck Japan, every child knows where to duck, where to hide. When a gas attack threatens countries in the Middle East, they know when they don their gas masks and they take it very seriously. The concern they raised was whether the public service operators' responsiveness or lack thereof in this incident might be perhaps symptomatic of the seriousness with which we in Singapore take rehearsals and drills to prepare for emergencies. Take, for example, fire drills that we undertake in buildings, how often do we go for coffee breaks, just before the alarm is raised ---

Mr Speaker : Mr Lee, can you please ask your question?

Column: 54

Mr Desmond Lee : Can I ask the Minister what wider lessons we can draw from this incident so that, in future, we are not just better prepared for public transport disruptions but better prepared for all emergencies that we may face?

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : Mr Speaker, that is a very difficult last question to deal with, but I think it is a very pertinent one. I am not so sure that I have all the answers to what the Member has just raised because he has raised very important points about how we can be better prepared, especially psychologically, as a people. In total defence, psychological defence is one of the key pillars. We are of a different mindset if we know that we are always exposed to such natural disasters or manmade incidents. Perhaps, because it is something unusual, something that we are not accustomed to, sometimes, our responses may not be as instinctive and as appropriate as it might otherwise be.

Hence, because it is not instinctive, all the more reason we need to have as realistic exercises as possible, involve as many people as we can and try and then use them as multipliers to reach out to as many others as we possibly can. So that they understand that in an emergency, it actually picks a certain amount of preparedness -- physical, psychological and emotional -- in order to best respond to it and be able to preserve life and limb.

It is not easy to deal with it because, as the Member has pointed out himself, for fire drills, how seriously do we take it? I think the military in particular tries to inculcate this because if you do not respond properly, it could be your life. And so they do a good job of it. I certainly know that happens within the two years of National Service, and thereafter, you try to make sure that when your NSmen come back, they get a dose of it. Hopefully, this carries them through over time. But there is also a need to look at it not only from the individual response but from the collective response because, sometimes,

if you have one person breaking out in panic, it just stymies everybody into a stampede. So you need to have leaders, you need to have people who are able to remain calm themselves and who are, in that sense, catalyst for calmness in chaotic situations. And then, to be able to identify these people, give them some amount of training, even recognition, and hopefully they are in the right place, at the right time, to be able to influence crowd behaviour. I think that is also another factor that we may well have to consider going forward.

Column: 54

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, "That Parliament do now adjourn to Monday, 16 January 2012." - [Dr Ng Eng Hen].

Adjourned accordingly at

Eight Minutes past Five o'clock pm.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWER NOT ANSWERED BY 3.00 PM

Column: 55

EMPLOYERS' PLEDGE FOR FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

(Adherence)

22 **Ms Tin Pei Ling** asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Manpower (a) how does the Ministry intend to tighten governance to ensure public sector employers who have signed the Employers' Pledge of Fair Employment Practices adhere to fair employment practices; (b) how many complaints of age discrimination against both public and private sector employers have been received since 2007; and (c) how have these complaints been addressed to ensure fair and just outcomes.

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam : The Employers' Pledge of Fair Employment Practices is an initiative by the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices (TAFEP) to reach out to both private and public sector establishments in its promotion of fair employment, including age-friendly practices. To date, over 1,800 establishments have signed the Employers' Pledge of Fair Employment Practices. This includes all the Ministries and major Statutory Boards. While signing the pledge does not involve a legal obligation, it is a significant affirmation by an establishment of its commitment to the principles of fair employment. Pledge signers are expected to abide by the guidelines in good faith, and implement fair employment practices, including fair treatment of older workers.

TAFEP has been effective in tackling discriminatory practices, including age-related discrimination. For example, TAFEP has been successful in advising companies to remove age-discriminatory criteria in recruitment. Since its inception in 2006, TAFEP has received 140 complaints on age discrimination. Seven complaints (or 5%) involved public sector agencies, with the remainder from the private sector. So far, all employers approached by TAFEP following a complaint have heeded TAFEP's advice by changing their employment practices.

Recruitment into the Public Service is based solely on individual merit, through fair and open competition. The most suitable candidate is recruited regardless of age, gender, marital status, race or religion. Similarly for in-service officers, training and development opportunities are available to all, and the rewards and recognition framework is based on rewarding for performance regardless of age, gender, marital status, race or religion as well. Where PSD is aware of an irregular practice, including recruitment which is not in line with the principles of fair employment, on the part of public sector

agencies, Public Service Division will remind the agencies involved to adhere to the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices.

Any employee, including an older worker, who encounters discriminatory practices during recruitment or at the workplace, should approach TAFEP, or their union if they are union members, for advice and assistance.

Column: 56

PARKS AND PARK CONNECTORS

23 **Dr Teo Ho Pin** asked the Minister for National Development (a) how many kilometres of park connectors were built so far; (b) what is the development plan for new parks and park connectors over the next five years; and (c) whether there are plans to make all parks and park connectors more elderly friendly with toilet facilities and better lightings.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan : The National Parks Board (NParks) has completed 200 kilometres of park connectors so far.

Over the next five years, we plan to build another 100 kilometres of park connectors and 20 new parks. The plan includes the proposed North Eastern Riverine Loop which will link up Punggol Park, Punggol Point Park, Punggol Waterway Park and the Sengkang Riverside Park.

NParks has been incorporating barrier-free design and adequate lightings in the development of its parks, to make them user-friendly to people of all ages.

Toilet facilities are provided in larger parks, like the regional parks. The smaller community and neighbourhood parks serve residents who live less than 500 metres away. They are not provided with toilet facilities.

Column: 56

NORTH-SOUTH EXPRESSWAY (NSE)

(Study of alternative options)

24 **Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song** asked the Minister for Transport (a) whether other options were studied by the Ministry before it decided to build the North-South Expressway (NSE); (b) if so, what were the options and what were the reasons for building the NSE instead of pursuing these other options; and (c) whether the Government had considered the feasibility of adding a second level to the existing Central Expressway instead of building a new expressway.

Mr Lui Tuck Yew : The North-South Expressway (NSE) is a high capacity road link to connect people in the northern regions of Singapore to the city centre. It will serve to relieve congestion along major road corridors and to better distribute traffic on our expressway network.

Many Singaporeans will benefit directly from the NSE as their travel time between the north and the city centre is expected to be reduced by up to 30%. The NSE will also create new connections currently not available on our expressway network. For example, motorists travelling on the Pan-Island Expressway (PIE) towards Changi can connect to the city centre with the planned PIE/NSE interchange. Without the NSE, congestion on the Central Expressway (CTE) and major roads along the North-South corridor, such as Thomson Road, will build up with expected residential growth in the north and employment growth in the city centre.

The Government adopts a holistic approach in developing Singapore's urban transport system to support economic growth. This includes expanding the public transport network and optimising our road system through complementary measures such as Electronic Road Pricing and Intelligent Transport Systems. Even as we promote the use of public transport, we still need to ensure that our road network remains relatively smooth-flowing, to cater to the needs of all road users, which include not only private cars, but also goods vehicles and buses.

Column: 57

The Government will proceed with new roads only after careful planning and study, and when we are certain that they are needed. This is the case for the NSE. Various options such as the widening of existing roads, alternative alignments, and alternative construction methods such as bored tunnelling were studied. This included taking into consideration the engineering feasibility, the need to minimise land acquisition, and the potential disamenities that could result. Various agencies deliberated carefully on the land use considerations and trade-offs involved before the final decision on the alignment and configuration of the NSE was made.

Adding a second level to the CTE was one of the options studied. It was found not optimal as the adjacent roads connecting with the CTE will attract more traffic, resulting in the need to widen them, with associated need for more land-take and other disamenities. A separate expressway corridor will achieve a more efficient distribution of traffic on our road network. There are also engineering difficulties in double-stacking the viaduct portions of the CTE.

I hope Members will understand that difficult decisions had to be made to undertake a major road project such as the NSE, and we will evaluate the trade-offs very carefully before making these decisions.

Column: 57

EMBEZZLEMENT OF PUBLIC FUNDS BY FIVE OFFICERS OF MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS

(Disciplinary action taken)

25 **Mr Hri Kumar Nair** asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs in respect of the disciplinary action taken against five officers of the Ministry whose oversight allowed funds to be embezzled at the Ministry, in what manner did the officers fail to discharge their duties and what punishment did each receive.

Mr Teo Chee Hean : Following audits conducted after the 2010 SLA fraud case, facts were uncovered which suggested that an MHA clerical officer, Liew Chee Meng, had committed certain offences related to procurement under his charge. A police report was immediately made. Subsequent investigations by the Commercial Affairs Department resulted in criminal prosecution against Liew. Liew was recently convicted and received a sentence of 104 months.

While police investigations were ongoing, MHA convened an Independent Review Panel to examine the facts and circumstances of the case, and to review control systems. My Ministry has since implemented all the recommendations made by the Review Panel.

The Review Panel highlighted weaknesses in the procurement approval process and financial control systems. More robust supervisory controls should have been in place, and officers responsible for

overseeing disbursement of funds for procurement should have been more vigilant.

Column: 58

Based on the findings, MHA took disciplinary action against five officers. Three of them were issued Letters of Warning, namely, Liew's supervisor, a senior staff overseeing financial matters, and a staff overseeing procurement matters. They were also given a poor performance grade and will have their performance bonus cut. The other two junior level officers who processed the various payment requests were issued with Letters of Advice.

MHA views this case extremely seriously, and has since tightened procurement processes and strengthened internal controls and supervision.

Column: 58

IMMIGRATION AND CHECKPOINTS AUTHORITY

(Investing in new technology)

28 **Assoc Prof Fatimah Lateef** asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs how is the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority investing in new technology for all areas of their work, including biometric identification, so as to adapt to the more sophisticated and high technology environment of today.

Mr Teo Chee Hean : Over the years, ICA has invested judiciously in technology to enhance its capabilities in protecting Singapore's borders. The use of technology has facilitated and supported ICA's effort to maintain a good balance between secure border protection and an efficient flow of people and commerce. This is especially important given the increased security requirements since 2001, and the large and increasing numbers of people and goods entering and leaving Singapore every day. Let me now share some concrete examples of technology use in the areas of biometric identification of people, inspection of goods, and bio-security.

At the checkpoints, ICA uses biometric identification to identify and stop immigration offenders and undesirable travelers. Since the introduction of the Biometric Database for Immigration Clearance system in 2004, ICA has captured immigration offenders' fingerprints and photo images in its databases. This has successfully thwarted many criminal attempts to re-enter Singapore using fraudulent identities.

At the same time, biometric information of Singaporeans has been used to expedite immigration clearance. With the deployment of the enhanced Immigration Automated Clearance in 2006, three million Singaporeans who hold a passport are able to clear themselves swiftly through the automated immigration clearance system.

More recently, ICA has been testing iFaces, which is a real-time facial recognition biometrics system. This facial recognition and biometric identification technology was progressively tested through pilot trials from 2009. Since January 2011, ICA has deployed it at the Woodlands Motorcycle Zones. Using iFaces, the immigration officer can better detect fraudulent identities by using facial information in the traveler's passport biodata page to match against the facial database of immigration offenders and persons of interests.

Checks on containers at the ports used to rely on physical visual inspection or cumbersome X-ray systems. These old methods meant that up to half an hour was required to inspect a container,

significantly slowing down traffic flow. In 2009, ICA introduced the Integrated Cargo Inspection System (ICIS) at sea checkpoints that can scan containers quickly and efficiently without compromising security standards. This new system can clear up to 200 containers per hour, compared to two containers per hour in the old system, leading to significant efficiency gains. Ground officers can also rely on the ICIS to quickly identify threats.

Column: 59

ICA has invested heavily in infrastructure and technology to identify and deal with potential bio-security threats. In 2009, ICA implemented the Protective & Analytical Facilities (PAF) at Tuas Checkpoint which enabled ICA to conduct reliable and rapid on-site analysis of biological agents and toxic chemicals.

The examples that I have quoted are not exhaustive. Checkpoint operations, border control equipment and technology systems must be constantly reviewed to keep pace with new demands and evolving security threats. Having the best technologies alone is not sufficient. Technology can only be an enabler. Within the overall security framework, the human element in learning, understanding, and applying those technologies is paramount. ICA will continue to develop and train its officers with the right skill sets and work attitudes to ensure that our borders continue to remain safe and secure.

Column: 59

INCREASE IN NON-RESIDENTS AND PERMANENT RESIDENTS

30 **Mrs Lina Chiam** asked the Prime Minister why has the number of non-residents and Permanent Residents increased by 80,400 in 2011 (till June) compared to 59,100 in 2010 despite repeated assurances that the inflow of foreigners into Singapore will be curtailed.

Mr Teo Chee Hean : Our total population was 5.18 million as at June 2011, an increase of 2.1% over June 2010¹. Within the same period, our Permanent Resident (PR) population shrank by 9,000. Since late 2009, we have moderated the inflow of PRs significantly, granting 29,265 PRs in 2010, as compared to 59,460 in 2009 and 79,167 in 2008. We will continue to manage the pace of immigration to ensure that immigrants are of good quality and able to integrate well into our society.

Our non-resident (NR) population grew by 6.9% between June 2010 and June 2011, mainly contributed by the growth in the number of foreigners working here on employment and work passes. This was due to the strong job creation in 2010 on the back of a sharp economic recovery, which saw GDP grow by an unprecedented 14.5%. The strong demand for workers could not be fully met from our resident workforce. About half² of the jobs created were filled by residents. The Government has progressively strengthened measures to ensure that Singaporeans remain the core of our workforce, and foreigners who come to work here have skills that are valuable to Singapore. Measures include higher qualifying salaries for Employment Pass (EP) and S-Pass holders, the tightening of the eligibility requirements for EP holders, and further changes to the foreign worker levy rates and tiers for S-Pass and Work Permit holders.

However, companies may go out of business or decide not to invest in Singapore if the labour market is too rigid. Singaporeans could lose their businesses or jobs as a result. This is why the Government is also helping companies, especially the SMEs, upgrade their productivity to reduce their reliance on foreign workers.

Column: 60

The Government remains committed to our goal of sustainable and inclusive economic growth for Singaporeans, and we will manage and moderate the flow of foreign workers so that Singapore can continue to develop and prosper.

Column: 60

HDB FLATS WITH SHORTER LEASES

34 **Mr Gan Thiam Poh** asked the Minister for National Development whether HDB will consider offering new HDB flats with shorter leases such as 50 years or 70 years so that the sale price of new HDB flats can be reduced and made even more affordable and attractive for Singaporeans.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan : We do offer new HDB flats with shorter leases where it will benefit the prospective buyers. For example, Studio Apartments are sold with 30-year leases to senior citizens as their retirement homes.

The vast majority of new HDB flat buyers are young married couples. Shorter leases may not be suitable for their life-cycle needs. Many will need their first HDB flats to help them upgrade to larger homes or private properties when their families grow. And when they retire, if their first HDB flats were of a shorter lease, their prospect of using them to buy into Studio Apartments as retirement homes with sufficient cash proceeds, will be limited.

New HDB flats with 99-year leases can still be affordable for our young first-timer households. And our approach to achieve this is to stabilise the prices of new flats, as we have done since May last year. With Government housing grants, their monthly mortgage instalments can be funded through their CPF contributions, often with little cash outlay.

There is a wide range of housing options. With prudence and the right level of expectation, almost all Singaporeans can afford their homes.

Column: 60

GOVERNMENT'S ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY IN ROCHOR AREA

35 **Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song** asked the Minister for National Development whether any consultation was done with residents and business owners before the decision was taken to acquire the HDB blocks, private properties and shops in the Rochor area (including Rochor Centre) to build the North-South Expressway.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan : The North-South Expressway (NSE) is a major road infrastructure that connects the north and north eastern sectors of the island with the city centre. LTA has conducted very thorough studies to identify the best possible alignment taking into account engineering requirements while minimising the need for land acquisition.

Whilst the best efforts have been put in to minimise land acquisition, the Government will still need to acquire some land in the highly built-up Rochor area, in order to construct the NSE. Other than Rochor Centre, small portions of the landscaped areas of Golden Landmark, Gateway and The Plaza are also being acquired within the Rochor area for the NSE construction.

Column: 61

We were unable to consult those potentially affected by the road proposal prior to its announcement because such information is market sensitive.

Immediately following the announcement of the full alignment of the NSE on 15 November 2011, HDB explained the acquisition and relocation package to affected flat owners and shop tenants personally through door-to-door visits. Affected property owners will receive market value statutory compensation. Affected HDB flat owners at Rochor Centre will also receive assistance to relocate to a replacement property, while the shop tenants will be given clearance benefits.

Column: 61

UPGRADED MARKET AND FOOD CENTRE AT BLOCK 210, TOA PAYOH

36 **Mrs Lina Chiam** asked the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources (a) what is the total cost for the renovation and upgrading of the market and food centre at Blk 210 Toa Payoh Lorong 8; (b) before and after the renovation, whether the Ministry had received any feedback and complaints from the local residents on the newly upgraded market and food centre; and (c) if so, what are the feedback and complaints.

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan : The Market/Hawker Centre at Block 210 Toa Payoh Lorong 8 was upgraded under the Hawker Centres Upgrading Programme (HUP) from 1 November 2010 to 30 September 2011 at a cost of \$4.5 million. Prior to the upgrading, we gathered feedback from the stallholders and addressed their concerns on poor cross ventilation by reconfiguring the stall layout and introducing a new exhaust food and flue system for better ventilation.

Since the Centre resumed business on 1 October 2011, we have received positive feedback from stallholders and residents. They appreciate the more comfortable dining environment because of better ventilation, larger circulation area and increased seating capacity. We also received some feedback that the lighting in several areas can be further improved and NEA is looking into this.

We noted that in the first few days of the Centre's opening, there were some teething problems with the table-cleaning services as the new contractor was initially unfamiliar with the centre. The matter has since been resolved. NEA will continue to work closely with the Hawkers Association and the Potong Pasir Town Council to ensure that the common areas are kept clean.

Column: 61

FOREIGN DOCTORS IN PUBLIC HOSPITALS

37 **Er Dr Lee Bee Wah** asked the Minister for Health with the engagement of foreign doctors in public hospitals (a) what due diligence is being done to ensure that the doctors recruited are qualified and meet our local standards of medical practice; (b) whether the Ministry has received any negative feedback on the practices of any of these foreign doctors in the past two years; and (c) whether are there plans to increase the intake of medical trainees at the National University of Singapore to meet the increasing demand for doctors.

Mr Gan Kim Yong : Foreign doctors seeking medical registration in Singapore are required to meet the following criteria for registration

Column: 62

a) Possess registrable basic or postgraduate qualifications recognised by the Singapore Medical Council (SMC);

b) Have been in active clinical practice;

- c) Are certified to be in good standing by the relevant authorities overseas; and,
- d) Have an offer of employment with an accredited healthcare institution in Singapore.

Such doctors are deemed to have met the standards required of them to practise in Singapore. The list of registrable basic medical qualifications is based on the Second Schedule of the Medical Registration Act. Currently, there are 160 medical schools listed in the Second Schedule. Registrable postgraduate medical qualifications are based on a list of qualifications and training recognised by the Singapore Medical Council.

Foreign doctors are required to work, initially, only in institutions that are accredited by SMC, such as all public healthcare institutions and a few private healthcare institutions, for a stipulated period, where they are subjected to SMC's supervisory framework. The objective is to help them acclimatise to the local healthcare system for patients' safety. They are supervised by fully registered doctors, are regularly assessed and their performance reported to SMC.

Seven foreign doctors had their registration cancelled due to poor performance over the past three years (two in 2009, three in 2010, and two in 2011). Based on the total number of foreign doctors registered as at end of the year, the cancellation rate was, on average, about 0.2% annually over the same period (0.2% in 2009, 0.2% in 2010 and 0.1% in 2011).

We also receive feedback on general service quality of doctors, in areas such as poor communication ability, lack of courtesy, etc. Proportionally, the number of complaints against foreign doctors is not higher than the overall rate for all doctors.

These foreign doctors play an important role in our healthcare sector by supplementing locally trained doctors to meet our growing healthcare needs. Nevertheless, we have been steadily increasing the pipeline of locally trained doctors. Student intake at NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine for 2011 was 280 compared to 230 in 2005. We anticipate the number to grow to 300 this year. Further, we have established the NUS-Duke Graduate Medical School in 2007 with an annual intake of about 50 this year, and will be starting the new Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine in 2013 with an inaugural intake of 50 students. At steady state, these three medical schools are expected to train a total of about 500 doctors annually, which is almost double the number of current graduates.

Column: 62

FOREIGN SCHOLARS

40 **Mr Yee Jenn Jong** asked the Minister for Education for the last 10 years what was (i) the annual number of foreigners who were granted scholarships by the Ministry to study in our schools and universities and the annual cost of these scholarships; (ii) the percentage of foreign scholars who commenced studies in secondary schools and proceeded on to local universities; (iii) the percentage of foreign scholars in local universities who had graduated with Second Class Upper Honours or better; and (iv) the percentage of foreign scholars who completed their contractual bond period to work in Singapore after their graduation.

Column: 63

Mr Heng Swee Keat : For students from ASEAN countries, MOE offers scholarships to promote mutual understanding and goodwill in the region. In the past few years, MOE awarded around 150 scholarships annually to students from the ASEAN countries at the pre-tertiary level and another 170 at the undergraduate level. The scholarships cover school fees and accommodation, and the annual cost is

about \$14,000 for each pre-tertiary scholarship and between \$18,000 to \$25,000 for each undergraduate scholarship. Around 65% of pre-tertiary international scholars progress on to our Autonomous Universities.

In addition, our schools, universities and the corporate sector also offer a range of scholarships to quality international students to create a diverse student body that encourages the learning of important cross-cultural skills, as well as to meet the manpower needs of our economy. With Singapore's decreasing fertility rates, it is important that even as we seek to better develop our talent pool, we augment this with working professionals and students from abroad. This helps us to maintain our economic competitiveness and ultimately raise the standard of living of our people.

Of all the international students who graduated from our Autonomous Universities in 2011, around 45% did so with a Second Upper class of Honours or better.

Upon graduation, scholars are obliged to work in Singapore or Singapore companies for up to six years. More than eight in 10 scholars have been working in Singapore and are contributing to our economy. As for those who did not start work immediately, many had deferred their bonds to pursue postgraduate studies.

Column: 63

INCREASED DEMAND FOR FOREIGN WORKERS DUE TO CONSTRUCTION OF MORE PUBLIC FLATS

46 **Mr Arthur Fong** asked the Minister for National Development to cope with the increase in the building of more public housing, what increase in demand for more foreign workers is the Ministry expecting.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan : Last year, HDB needed about 18,000 construction workers for its building programme.

This is expected to increase to about 30,000 to meet this year's building programme. As each building programme will take three to five years to complete, the cumulative requirement of construction workers could rise to 45,000 within the next few years.

Column: 63

HANDLING OF PERSONS WITH SUSPECTED COMMUNICABLE DISEASES AT ENTRY POINTS

48 **Assoc Prof Fatimah Lateef** asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs (a) how do immigration officers handle a person with a suspected communicable disease at the point of entry into Singapore; and (b) whether there are specific protocols and assessments that are carried out.

Mr Teo Chee Hean : As the agency responsible for Singapore's border security, the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) protects Singapore against the entry of undesirable persons and cargo through our land, air, and sea checkpoints. In addition, ICA provides the first line of defence against the importation of communicable diseases into Singapore.

Column: 64

Broadly speaking, communicable diseases are caused by pathogens which can be transmitted across humans. It should be noted that most communicable diseases, such as the common cold, are not severe,

and will not warrant routine border control. Hence the focus is on communicable diseases with pandemic potential. Working closely with MOH and NEA, ICA has put in place health and disease control measures, case detection, and referral protocols at all checkpoints. These comprehensive measures protect Singapore against the importation of diseases with pandemic potential.

I will explain the controls in place using the example of Yellow Fever, which is a communicable disease of international public health concern. Upon arrival, the traveller will first have to fill up the Embarkation/ Disembarkation Card and declare whether he has been to a Yellow Fever- affected country. A traveller who declares so will have to submit a Yellow Fever Vaccination Certificate as evidence of vaccination. If the traveller is unable to do so, ICA officers will refer the traveller to NEA officers for their assessment and follow-up. If the disease is assessed to be of grave threat to Singapore, the traveller may be denied entry.

For communicable diseases with high pandemic potential and rapid transmission, MOH, NEA and ICA will activate Border Health Control measures and work closely to protect our borders.

To illustrate, during the SARS outbreak of 2003 in 2009, public health measures implemented at the checkpoints included:

- a. Filling up of Health Declaration Cards by all visitors;
- b. 100% temperature screening for all inbound and outbound travellers;
- c. Referral of suspected travellers to medical staff for isolation, medical assessment, treatment and quarantine.

To summarise, ICA takes into account the threat and nature of the communicable disease when imposing specific public health measures and protocols. This ensures that the effort to counter and neutralize the communicable disease threat does not cause unnecessary burden on travellers. MHA and ICA will continue to work with our partner agencies to ensure that there is a robust framework to decisively deal with the threat of any communicable disease.

Column: 64

IMPACT OF REITS ON RENTALS

49 **Mr Zaqy Mohamad** asked the Minister for National Development (a) if he will provide an assessment on the REIT segment and its influence on rising commercial rents for businesses; (b) whether the Ministry has performed any studies on the difference in rental and real estate valuations between commercial buildings or shopping centres run by REITs and non-REITs; and (c) what is the Government's assurance that commercial rents remain affordable to local businesses.

Column: 65

Mr Khaw Boon Wan : Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) are publicly-listed trusts that own and manage a portfolio of real estate properties which could include shopping malls, offices, hotels and serviced apartments. REITs are passive, income-generating investment vehicles and its activities, manager and trustee are subject to MAS' regulations and guidelines. For instance, REITS are required to obtain an independent valuation when acquiring a particular property.

Apart from this, the manner in which a REIT manages its properties is similar to that of any other commercial real estate company. Rentals are determined by a number of factors, including the type and

quality of the properties that they own, how well they manage these properties, and, most importantly, broader economic fundamentals, such as GDP growth. These factors determine rentals and real estate valuations of commercial properties more than whether they are owned by REITS or non-REITS.

Currently, there are eight commercial REITs in Singapore, which together own about 11% of the overall stock of office and retail space in Singapore. Each REIT will have to compete with other REITS and developers, and is unlikely to be able to significantly influence rentals in the property market.

The Government's role is to ensure an adequate supply of commercial space to meet medium-term demand. Based on committed projects in the pipeline, we will have about 200,000 square metres of new office space and 90,000 square metres of new shop space per annum over the next five years. This is significantly higher than the historical take-up rate.

While commercial rentals have increased since 2010, after our economy emerged from the last recession, the increase has been moderating since the beginning of 2011 and commercial rentals remain below their previous peak in mid-2008. Some analysts suggest that commercial rentals may decline this year.

We will continue to monitor the commercial property market closely and promote a stable and sustainable market where rentals remain competitive and affordable for businesses.

Column: 65

SALE OF CIGARETTES TO UNDERAGED YOUTHS

51 **Dr Janil Puthuchery** asked the Minister for Health (a) how many tobacco retailers have been prosecuted in 2011 for selling cigarettes to underage youth; (b) whether the number of underage smokers has been increasing from 2004 to 2010 and, if so, whether the prosecution of errant retailers has been effective in curbing underage smoking; (c) whether the Ministry will consider imposing harsher penalties on errant retailers; and (d) what other new control measures are being considered to curb underage smoking.

Mr Gan Kim Yong : We use multi-pronged strategies and approaches to discourage the initiation of smoking in youths and help those who smoke to kick the habit. The number of underage smokers caught has increased by 18% over the past six years, from 5,884 in 2004 to 6,947 in 2010. This increase is largely due to stepped up enforcement efforts by the Health Sciences Authority and partner agencies like the Police, National Environment Agency (NEA), schools and Singapore Customs.

Column: 66

It is also important that we prevent underage youths from having easy access to tobacco in the first place. Therefore, the penalties for errant retailers caught selling tobacco to underaged youths were increased on 1 December 2010. The new penalties include the prosecution of first-time errant sellers and six-month licence suspension. In addition, retailers caught blatantly selling cigarettes to youths under 12 years old or in school uniform would have their licences revoked with immediate effect. A total of 44 sellers, including 42 licensed tobacco retailers and two illegal peddlers, have been prosecuted for sales of tobacco to underaged youths in 2011 to date. These efforts have also helped tobacco retailers to be more aware of the consequences of tobacco sales to minors.

To further reduce accessibility, we have tightened the criteria for tobacco retail licences last year to prohibit tobacco sales at premises whose primary business are health-related or youth-centric products or services. These include Chinese medical halls, health supplement shops, game arcades,

confectionaries, as well as candy, comic and toy stores. We will continue to explore ways to further reduce accessibility of tobacco products. The Health Promotion Board (HPB) has worked with the Ministry of Education (MOE) to educate students on the harmful effects of smoking and ways to say no to offers of cigarettes. HPB also works with selected schools to implement targeted prevention and smoking cessation measures, including training for teachers and school counsellors, to help youth smokers to quit smoking. Besides schools, HPB also works closely with rehabilitative homes and self-help groups to reach out to youth smokers.

To better engage young people, HPB has also launched the “Live It Up Without Lighting Up” initiative, which highlights the benefits of being tobacco-free in areas that appeal to youths. Youths are supported via funding and other resources to organise activities to reach out to their peers, and HPB also leverages on youth-centric media and partners.

We have made some progress over the years. National surveys indicate that the proportion of Secondary One to Four students who have ever tried smoking declined from 26% in 2000 to 16% in 2009. The proportion of secondary school students who smoked at least one day in the last 30 days also fell from 11% in 2000 to 6% in 2009. Nevertheless, there is more to be done, as the prevalence of smoking among young adults aged 18 to 29 years old has increased from 12.3% in 2004 to 16.3% in 2010. My Ministry will continue to work with various agencies to protect our youths from the ills of smoking.

Column: 66

EXPENDITURE ON ANTI-SMOKING PROMOTION

52 Dr Janil Puthuchery asked the Minister for Health (a) what is the total economic burden including lost productivity due to smoking, passive tobacco exposure and tobacco-related diseases; (b) how much is currently spent on educational and preventive measures for smoking; (c) how does this compare to the current expenditure on educational or preventive measures for other common diseases; and (d) whether there are plans to increase the expenditure on tobacco control.

Mr Gan Kim Yong : The annual social cost of smoking in Singapore was estimated to be between \$600 million and \$800 million 1 in a 2002 study by the National University of Singapore. This includes the opportunity cost of tobacco-related work absenteeism as well as healthcare expenditure for tobacco-associated diseases.

Column: 67

I am pleased to share more recent findings which show that our National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP) driven by the Health Promotion Board (HPB) has resulted in 14,000 fewer cases of lung cancer and 4,700 fewer cases of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease between 1986 and 2006.

However, smoking prevalence has recently been on a rising trend from a low of 12.6% in 2004 to 13.6% in 2007 and 14.3 % in 2010, driven by significant increases in smoking among younger Chinese and Malay men aged 18 to 39. In response, my Ministry has been actively stepping up the NTCP. In 2011, \$14.6 million was allocated to HPB to enhance its targeted, multi-pronged strategies in both tobacco prevention and cessation, compared to \$10 million in 2010 and \$7.3 million in 2009.

As mentioned earlier, we have put into place various strategies to prevent our youth from picking up smoking.

We have also stepped up our efforts in tobacco cessation. HPB’s National Tobacco Control

Campaign in 2011, also known as the “I Quit Movement”, adopted a community-based but personalised approach that helps smokers build a support network to quit smoking successfully. Since its launch in June this year, HPB has observed a three-fold increase in the number of smokers (from 500 to more than 1,500) who have sought help to quit. The dedicated QuitLine is still receiving a 50% increase (from baseline of 15 to 20 calls per week) in the number of smokers calling in to seek help, six months past the launch of the “I Quit Movement”.

The NTCP budget is comparable to HPB’s expenditure for other priority areas. However, we should not measure our tobacco control effort solely by the amount spent on it. We have to ensure that our programmes are effective.

Moving forward, we expect to continue to invest the necessary resources on tobacco control, and will work with the Health Sciences Authority, Customs and National Environment Agency to intensify enforcement efforts to prevent underage smoking, smuggling of low-price cigarettes and smoking in public places respectively from undermining tobacco control efforts. We will also step up our efforts to discourage young adults from picking up smoking and to help smokers quit their habit.

Column: 67

GREEN CORRIDOR ALONG FORMER KTM RAILWAY LAND

53 **Mr Christopher de Souza** asked the Minister for National Development (a) whether the green corridor which sits along the returned railway land can be preserved to retain its historical richness and provide a valuable reminder to Singaporeans of our links to the past; and (b) how will the green belt which runs along the foot of Bukit Timah Hill (from Bukit Timah Station to Rail Mall) be preserved as part of the larger Bukit Timah Hill Reserve.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan : The Government recognises the importance of preserving the environmental and historical richness of the narrow strip of land which once held the Malayan Railway track. This can be achieved even as we seek to develop the returned railway land.

Column: 68

First, we have gazetted the Tanjong Pagar Railway Station as a national monument and the Bukit Timah Railway Station for conservation. This recognises their historical significance.

Second, we have retained the two iconic steel bridges across Dunearn Road and at Rail Mall.

Third, we are studying how to maintain a continuous green ‘spine’ along this Rail Corridor and achieve our development needs at the same time. The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) is seeking public views for ideas. Since July, we have received more than 500 suggestions. And in November, the URA launched an Ideas Competition entitled ‘Journey of Possibilities’ to draw innovative and fresh new ideas from the public in addressing some of the key challenges and issues in planning for the future use of the Rail Corridor. These efforts will help us crystallise the concept and development plans for the Rail Corridor. When ready, we will exhibit the draft plans and further invite the public to give their views on these plans.

As for the stretch of land next to the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve, it is currently zoned part “Residential” and part “Reserve”. The latter means that its use has yet to be determined. We will ensure that any development carried out there will preserve the connectivity of the corridor and its greenery and biodiversity. We would like to tap the best creative ideas for the development of the Rail Corridor. The URA will continue to engage the public as well as the design professionals to shape a shared vision for

the Rail Corridor.

Column: 68

SENIOR'S MOBILITY FUND

54 **Mr Desmond Lee** asked the Minister for Health whether the eligibility criteria for the Senior's Mobility Fund can be widened to (i) allow funding to be provided for a wider range of mobility items such as ramps, commodes and nursing beds; and (ii) cover elderly or disabled persons who are Permanent Residents but whose spouses or family members are Singapore citizens and would benefit from their enhanced mobility.

Mr Gan Kim Yong : The Senior's Mobility Fund (SMF) was introduced in April 2011 to fund basic mobility devices such as wheelchairs and walking frames for low-income elderly with mobility problems, so that they can move around with greater ease and be more independent.

We have since expanded the SMF to cover specialised transport services for elderly undergoing active rehabilitation in our community-based rehab centres. Centre for Enabled Living (CEL) provides financial assistance for commodes, shower chairs and nursing beds under the Special Assistance Fund. The Ministerial Committee on Ageing is also studying how the hardware within flats and HDB estates could be enhanced to make it easier and safer for seniors to move around.

With regard to Mr Lee's query to cover elderly or disabled persons who are Permanent Residents (PRs), our priority is to first reach out to our needy, elderly Singaporeans. As SMF is a relatively new scheme, we will continue to monitor the utilisation of funds and will review at a later stage if we can open it up to PRs.

Column: 69

SUB-LEASING OF HDB SHOPHOUSES TO SINGAPORE PEOPLE'S PARTY

56 **Mrs Lina Chiam** asked the Minister for National Development whether HDB will consider renting or subleasing HDB shophouses to the Singapore People's Party for its headquarters and, if not, what are the reasons.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan : A political party may rent or sublease a HDB shop for use as its headquarters, as long as the intended use does not cause disamenities to residents.

HDB lets out its shops through open tenders, as and when they become available. The Singapore People's Party (SPP) may participate in such a tender.

Alternatively, the SPP can sublet shop space from existing shop tenants or lessees. For tenanted shops, HDB allows its tenants to sublet up to 50% of the trading area. For sold shops, there is no such restriction.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Column: 70

REASONS FOR EMIGRATION

1 **Mr Pritam Singh** asked the Prime Minister how many Singaporeans gave up their citizenship from 2000 to 2010 and whether the Government has devised strategies to address the reasons why Singaporeans decide to emigrate.

Mr Teo Chee Hean : From 2000 to 2010, an average of about 1,000 Singaporeans renounced their citizenship annually. The reasons for emigration vary. Some indicated that they prefer a different living environment, whilst others emigrated due to their marriage to foreigners or to reunite with family members overseas.

Our focus is on ensuring that Singapore remains the best home for all Singaporeans. Beyond developing an attractive living environment and a thriving economy which sustains good jobs for our people, we also seek to strengthen the bonds that Singaporeans have with one another and with the country.

We will also continue to engage Singaporeans studying and working abroad. Through efforts, such as the Overseas Singaporean Unit's programmes, we hope to help this group maintain strong ties with Singapore, to facilitate their eventual return.

Column: 70

CITIZENSHIP APPLICATIONS BY PERMANENT RESIDENTS WHO HAVE SERVED NATIONAL SERVICE

2 **Ms Sylvia Lim** asked the Prime Minister (a) how many and what percentage of Permanent Residents who had served National Service and applied for Singapore citizenship had their applications rejected in the last five years; and (b) what were the main reasons for the rejection of such applications.

Mr Teo Chee Hean : From 2006 to 2010, about 3,000 second generation Permanent Residents who served National Service (NS) subsequently applied for Singapore citizenship. 160 of the 3,000 citizenship applications (about 2%) were rejected. This was due to the applicant's adverse record and/or because the applicant did not qualify for citizenship on his own merits.

Column: 70

ASSAULTS INVOLVING TEENS

3 **Mr Sitoh Yih Pin** asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs in light of the grievous attack on two students at Potong Pasir Avenue 1 on 1 December 2011 (a) what steps are being taken by the enforcement agencies to prevent similar incidents by youths; and (b) what steps are being taken to discourage, address and tackle similar/related incidents involving youths.

Column: 71

Mr Teo Chee Hean : Police treats all cases of violence very seriously and will respond firmly, regardless of the age of the perpetrators. Police conducts regular patrols at popular youth congregation areas to maintain law and order and to prevent youth crime and violence. To prevent at-risk youths from turning to or becoming victims of crime, Police writes to parents to inform them if their children are found loitering in public after 11pm under the Youth Hanging Out Late (YHOL) initiative. Since the initiative started in 2006, about 20,000 such letters have been issued. In addition, under joint efforts, such as the Citizens-on-Patrol scheme, resident volunteers patrol the neighbourhood with Police officers and act as eyes and ears on the ground.

These measures have kept youth crime in check. The number of youth arrests has remained stable at around 4,000 per year for the last five years. From January to November 2011, the number of youth arrests was 2,890. Police takes a serious view of such incidents of violence. The perpetrators of the Potong Pasir incident were swiftly arrested, and will be dealt with by the law. Following the incident,

Police also stepped up patrols, conducted spot-checks on more than 250 youths and distributed YHOL letters to parents of more than 74 youths in the neighbourhood.

Enforcement measures alone are not sufficient. Youth crime is a complex problem requiring a multi-agency approach. Many intervention programmes are co-ordinated under the National Youth Guidance and Rehabilitation Committee (NYGR) and include prisons visits, the Guidance Programme and the StreetWise Programme to divert youths away from crime and gangs. The Central Youth Guidance Office was also formed under the MCYS in July 2010 to enhance outreach to at-risk youths and co-ordinate inter-agency intervention services at the local level.

In addition, Police also works closely with schools and MCYS to implement the Youth Engagement Programme which aims to steer at-risk youths away from crime through character-building activities and participation in talks against gangs, crime and drugs.

More will be done. The Working Group on Youth Gangs has recommended a suite of measures to tackle youth crime and youth gangs. These include setting up a new Police Youth Offenders Unit and strengthening the Police-Schools-MCYS liaison framework to enhance intervention efforts and identify at-risk youths for the appropriate diversionary programmes. More residents in the Reformatory Training Centre and Singapore Boys' Home will benefit from programmes to help them deal with anger and related issues, and to strengthen their ties with their families.

When youths go astray, parents are our first line of defence. Families can, and should become part of the solution. It is the parents who can best guide the youths back onto the right path.

While the government will put in place the necessary intervention measures, youths who cross the line, and cause hurt, harm and distress to others must be prepared to face the full brunt of the law. With the involvement of families, social workers and the authorities, we can help steer our youths away from crime and prevent incidents of violence from occurring.

Column: 72

FOREIGN SPOUSES

4 **Mr Ang Hin Kee** asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Manpower in the past three years (a) how many Singaporeans have foreign spouses who are not Singapore permanent residents; (b) how many of these foreign spouses have work permits; and (c) how many work permit applications submitted by these foreign spouses were rejected.

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam : The table below shows the figures for the 2008-2010 period:

a) average number of foreign spouses of Singapore Citizens (SCs) on Long Term Visit Pass (LTVP), b) average number of foreign spouses of SCs on Work Permit (WP), and c) average proportion of rejected WP applications submitted by foreign spouses of SCs.

Table 1.

| | Average Per Year |
|---|------------------|
| Number of foreign spouses of SCs on LTVP | 9,375 |
| Number of foreign spouses of SCs on Work Permits* | 2,150 |
| Proportion of rejected WP applications submitted by foreign spouses of SCs* | 19.5% |

*Based on Work Permit holders/applicants who have declared themselves as spouses of SCs

Column: 72

VEHICULAR INCIDENTS AT CONSTRUCTION WORKSITES

5 **Mr Ang Hin Kee** asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Manpower (a) what is the number of accidents involving lorry cranes in construction work sites that took place over the last three years; and (b) whether the Ministry will consider implementing a new safety standard for new lorry cranes to have at least European, American or equivalent safety standards before they are allowed to be used.

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam : Lorry cranes are used by a variety of industries for purposes including roadside landscaping works, lifting of materials at construction worksites and loading and unloading of goods. There are close to 3,500 lorry cranes registered with MOM.

From 2009 to 2011, there were four fatalities involving lorry cranes. One death occurred in the construction industry and the others in the manufacturing, logistics and transport, and landscaping industries. 41 non-fatal lorry crane-related injuries were also recorded during the same period. ¹

Column: 73

Fatalities and injuries involving lorry cranes comprise a small proportion of all workplace accidents (2% of total fatal cases and 0.1% of non-fatal cases).² However, crane operations have the potential to cause serious accidents involving fatalities to workers and members of the public. For instance, in one of the incidents, a lorry crane struck a bus and killed a passenger on board.

A review of the safety of lorry crane operations was therefore conducted in 2010 as part of a larger industry-wide review of all crane operations at workplaces. The review concluded that the primary cause of the majority of lorry crane accidents was weakness in operator proficiency, rather than the adequacy of the design or integrity of the equipment. To address this, MOM recently announced a new requirement under the Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) (Operation of Cranes) Regulations 2011. All lorry crane operators will have to be certified under a new training course aimed at enhancing safe operation of cranes. This requirement is scheduled to take effect in September 2013 to give the industry sufficient lead time to attend the training course. The new course was developed by the WSH Council, in consultation with industry stakeholders.

Upon completion of the course, new lorry crane operators will have to pass a competency test before they are allowed to operate lorry cranes. Experienced lorry crane operators may be allowed to take the competency test directly if requirements are met.

MOM has in place a regulatory regime for companies that utilise all cranes, including lorry cranes. This includes explicit safety provisions to ensure that cranes are of good construction, sound material and adequate strength for its safe use at workplaces. Lorry cranes are also required to undergo yearly statutory examinations and tests conducted by authorised Professional Engineers to revalidate and recertify the structural and mechanical integrity of the lorry cranes for its continual safe use at workplaces. In addition, the WSH Act imposes specific duties on manufacturers and suppliers of hazardous equipment, including lorry cranes, to ensure in a reasonably practicable manner that the lorry cranes are safe and without risk to health when properly used.

The Ministry will continue to monitor the situation and work closely with the industry stakeholders to

improve the safety of operations of lorry cranes at workplaces. In addition, we have been and will continue to review the need to develop new safety standards, taking reference from experience in various developed economies, and implement new safety standards where relevant.

Column: 73

EMPLOYMENT PASSES ISSUED

6 **Mr Yaw Shin Leong** asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Manpower as at the end of 2011 what are the respective numbers of passes that have been issued for (i) P1 Employment Pass; (ii) P2 Employment Pass; (iii) Q1 Employment Pass; and (iv) S-Pass.

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam : The end 2011 statistics on Singapore's foreign workforce will only be available in early February 2012. The table below provides the year-end stock of Employment Pass (P1, P2, Q1 and Personalised Employment Pass) and S Pass holders for 2010.

| Year | 2010 |
|---------------|---------|
| EP and S Pass | 240,000 |
| EP | 142,000 |
| S Pass | 98,000 |

Column: 74

PRESERVING JOBS FOR SINGAPOREANS

7 **Mr Yaw Shin Leong** asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Manpower whether the Ministry will preserve Singaporeans' jobs in light of the uncertain economic outlook for 2012 by (i) requiring employers to look for qualified candidates at agencies such as the WDA and e2i before issuing employment passes; (ii) slowing down the approval rate of employment passes for firms which have conducted retrenchment exercises in the past one year involving 5% or more of Singaporeans in their workforce.

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam : MTI has estimated that economic growth in 2012 will slow down to between 1-3%, below our medium-term growth potential of 3-5%. While we may help companies weather a slowdown, we must also avoid moves that create unnecessary difficulties and uncertainty for businesses, and hence risk hurting the prospects for a recovery in growth and jobs for Singaporeans.

To enhance the employment of Singaporeans, both in periods of growth and slowdown, we have adopted a multi-pronged approach.

First, we seek to maintain a conducive environment for businesses to grow in order to create and sustain job opportunities in Singapore. At the same time, we invest heavily in education and training opportunities for Singaporeans to continuously upgrade their skill-sets to remain competitive and employable.

Second, we seek to progressively raise the quality of foreign manpower inflows and reduce over-reliance on foreign workers. From 1 January 2012, new Employment Pass applicants will have to meet more stringent eligibility criteria which include better educational qualifications and higher qualifying salaries. Foreign worker levies are also being raised every six months until 2013, to incentivise productivity improvements. We also refer companies seeking foreign manpower whose skills and

expertise are available locally to the Workforce Development Agency (WDA) and the Employment and Employability Institute (e2i) so that they can meet their manpower requirements.

Third, we utilise Tripartite Guidelines to help ensure that Singaporeans are not disadvantaged in their employment opportunities and that Singaporeans remain the core of our workforce. The Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices (TAFEP) released a set of revised guidelines on Fair Employment Practices in October 2011. The guidelines, which all employers are expected to adhere to, call for employers to make reasonable efforts to attract and consider Singaporeans for job positions on merit, and to train and develop their potential and careers. Such efforts include ensuring that all jobs advertised are open to Singaporeans, working with educational institutions, career centres and recruitment agencies such as WDA and e2i to attract and recruit Singaporeans, and developing the skills and expertise of Singaporean employees and grooming them for higher level jobs.

Column: 75

During the last downturn in 2008/2009, we also developed a set of “Tripartite Guidelines on Managing Excess Manpower” to help guide companies facing a business downturn to manage their workforce flexibly through alternative measures (eg, shorter workweek, training) instead of resorting to retrenchment. If the need arises, similar measures may be adopted to help employers and workers deal with the downturn.

The combined effect of the range of measures above is to help Singaporeans remain employed even during an economic slowdown. At the same time, we have to avoid measures which hinder companies’ ability to build up the skills and expertise of their teams. Doing that will reduce Singapore’s attractiveness to investors and businesses, limit our ability to respond quickly to changes in global market conditions, and ultimately dampen companies’ ability to create more and better jobs for Singaporeans.

Nevertheless, we will continue to monitor the economic and employment situation closely and make further refinements to our measures as necessary to help Singapore-based businesses and Singaporeans weather the impending economic slowdown.

Column: 75

MALE MA DRASAH GRADUATES

8 **Ms Sylvia Lim** asked the Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts and the Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs how many male Singaporeans completed their studies and graduated from *madrasahs* in the last three years.

Assoc Prof Dr Yaacob Ibrahim : The six full-time local *madrasahs* offer both religious and secular subjects up to different levels. *Madrasah* students leave the system at different points, following which many would continue their education at other institutions, including our ITEs, JCs and polytechnics. Some would proceed to complete their pre-university studies at the *madrasahs*. Between 2008 and 2010, about 150 male students continued with pre-university studies in the *madrasahs*.

Column: 75

DIRECT-PURCHASE HDB FLATS

(Numbers that are sold or rented out as full units)

9 **Dr Lim Wee Kiak** asked the Minister for National Development in the last five years (a) how

many direct-purchase HDB flats have been sold within two years of the Minimum Occupation Period (MOP) and what is the corresponding percentage of those not sold; and (b) how many flats are rented out as a full unit within two years of the MOP and how many of such flats are rented to permanent residents.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan : In the last five years (January 2007 – November 2011), 7,205 direct-purchase HDB flats were sold in the resale market within two years after completing their five-year Minimum Occupation Period (MOP). They made up 9% of all direct-purchase flats which were eligible for resale within the two years after MOP completion. The other 91% were not sold.

Column: 76

In the same period, 2,883 direct-purchase flats were sublet within two years after MOP completion. Amongst them, 971 were sublet to Singapore Permanent Residents.

Column: 76

USE OF CASH FOR PAYMENT OF HDB MORTGAGES

10 **Mr David Ong** asked the Minister for National Development (a) for 2010 and 2011, what is the number of Singaporeans who have to use cash to service their monthly HDB mortgage repayments when their total amount of CPF withdrawals have exceeded their flats' valuation limits and they cannot tap on their CPF Ordinary Account savings; (b) whether such cases are trending upwards over the last five years; and (c) what measures does the Ministry have in place for cases of Singaporeans who are unable to use cash to service their monthly HDB mortgage repayments.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan : In the last five years, about 0.2% of CPF members who service their mortgage through CPF have to use cash to pay their monthly instalments because their CPF usage has reached or exceeded the Valuation Limit of their flats. The vast majority do not have a problem servicing their mortgages through CPF.

For those lessees who face difficulty, HDB has a proactive programme to help them. If their financial problems are temporary, HDB may reduce or defer their mortgage instalments, or work out a revised instalment plan. Where necessary, HDB will also refer these lessees to the Community Development Councils for employment or financial aid, or other forms of social support.

For those who require long-term solutions, HDB will help them explore the options. For example, they can include their children to help them pay for the housing loan. They may also consider moving to a smaller flat, with another HDB loan. In some cases, they may be offered a subsidised rental flat.

Column: 76

FALLEN TREES

11 **Mr David Ong** asked the Minister for National Development (a) what is the number of reported cases of fallen trees in 2011; and (b) given the frequent heavy downpour and storms, whether the Minister will provide an update on the technology used by NParks to monitor the condition of trees to prevent future disruptions by fallen trees.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan : There were 1,511 cases of tree failures in 2011. Tree failures refer to uprooted trees, snapped branches and broken trunks.

NParks has intensified its monitoring and inspection efforts to look out for signs of poor condition,

disease, pests or structural defects in our trees. It pays special attention to the larger mature trees, especially those in areas with high vehicular traffic.

The types of instruments and technology used by NParks include decay detection micro-drills (such as the Resistograph which measures the level of resistance in the tree trunks), and sound wave imaging (using the PiCUS Sonic Tomograph to measure the speed of sound waves through the tree trunks), to detect and identify the extent of internal defects, such as cavities and decay, in the internal wood of our trees. If the trees' condition or structural stability is found to be compromised, NParks will remove and replace the trees.

Column: 77

REQUIREMENTS FOR PERMANENT RESIDENTS BUYING HDB FLATS

12 **Mr Ang Hin Kee** asked the Minister for National Development whether the Ministry will consider making it mandatory for (i) Singapore Permanent Residents (SPRs) who own HDB flats to be occupants in their flats; and (ii) SPRs who are no longer residing in the flat to sell the flat back to the market within a reasonable period of time.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan : SPR households cannot buy new HDB flats. They can only buy from the resale market. They are also not eligible for Government subsidies.

HDB flats are primarily meant for owner-occupation. But some flat owners may not be able to occupy their flats for certain periods of time for legitimate reasons, eg, work assignment overseas. Such flat owners may apply to HDB to seek approval to sublet their flats. HDB assesses each application on its merits, and each approval granted is valid for up to three years. To continue subletting, the flat owner has to submit a fresh application. Hence, approval to sublet flats is not granted automatically or indefinitely.

The vast majority of SPR households who own HDB flats, over 95%, are owner-occupants. This is similar to the proportion for citizen households.

Column: 77

MARRIED CHILD PRIORITY SCHEME

13 **Assoc Prof Fatimah Lateef** asked the Minister for National Development whether there is a need to review HDB's Married Child Priority Scheme in respect of the condition that the estate applied for must be within two kilometres of a parent's or married child's existing block as most mature estates may not have units available within that radius.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan : We have applied the Married Child Priority Scheme (MCPS) flexibly. For example, those applying to live in the same town or estate as their parents or married child are deemed to have qualified for the MCPS and there is no requirement for a 2-kilometre proximity.

We think that the current practice is adequate. It has allowed many to avail themselves of the MCPS. In the past three years, around 20% of BTO applications were made under the MCPS.

Besides the MCPS, first-timers who wish to live with or close to their parents in mature estates, where the supply of new flats is more limited, can consider buying a resale flat. They will be eligible for the Higher-Tier CPF Housing Grant of \$40,000 on meeting the same broad criteria on proximity as the MCPS.

Column: 77

COMPENSATION FOR ROCHOR RESIDENTS AFFECTED BY GOVERNMENT ACQUISITION

14 **Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song** asked the Minister for National Development what is the compensation that the residents of the flats in the Rochor area affected by the upcoming land acquisition will receive if they choose not to relocate to the new flats in Kallang.

Column: 78

Mr Khaw Boon Wan : All HDB flat owners at Rochor Centre will be compensated for their existing flats based on the prevailing market values as at the date of announcement of the acquisition, ie, 15 November 2011. This is regardless of whether they decide to take up the new replacement flats in Kallang. The market value will be assessed by a qualified and professional private valuer licensed by the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore after a thorough physical inspection of each flat.

On top of the market compensation, all the flat owners will be paid reasonable expenses, which comprise a removal allowance as well as stamp and conveyancing fees to buy a comparable replacement flat.

They are also given a relocation package, similar to those offered under the Selective En-bloc Redevelopment Scheme (SERS). They will be assured of a new replacement HDB flat in the vicinity of Kallang MRT station, which they can purchase at subsidised prices frozen as at 15 November 2011 and will further enjoy a 20% price discount (up to \$30,000) if eligible.

If they choose not to relocate to the new flats in Kallang, they may apply for a new flat elsewhere under HDB's public sales exercises and enjoy the same relocation benefits, including the price discount. Alternatively, they may choose to sell their existing flat with the relocation package in the resale market, which will typically fetch a premium above the compensation. With the sale proceeds, they may then find alternative accommodation on their own.

Column: 78

IMPRISONMENT FOR NATIONAL SERVICE DEFAULTERS

15 **Mr Lim Biow Chuan** asked the Minister for Defence how many National Service (NS) defaulters have been sentenced to imprisonment for defaulting NS over the past three years and whether all NS defaulters will be sentenced to imprisonment.

Dr Ng Eng Hen : Over the past three years, five National Service (NS) defaulters have been sentenced to imprisonment by the Court.

To maintain equity of treatment and the commitment for all who are liable to serve their NS, it is necessary to take a tough stand against the few who default on their NS obligations. MINDEF will press for a custodial sentence on the NS defaulter based on the length of default and the following guidelines:

a. Short jail sentence. Where the default period exceeds two years but the defaulter is young enough to serve his full-time and operationally ready NS (ORNS) duties in full, MINDEF will press for a short jail sentence.

b. Longer jail sentence. Where the defaulter has reached an age when he cannot serve his full-time NS in a combat vocation or fulfil his ORNS obligations in full, MINDEF will press for a longer jail

sentence to reflect the period of NS evaded.

c. **Maximum jail sentence.** Where the defaulter has passed the age of 40 and cannot be called up for NS at all, MINDEF will press for a jail sentence up to the maximum of three years.

Column: 79

The Court decides on the sentence received by NS defaulters taking into consideration the circumstances of the individual case and the sentence MINDEF has pressed for. After their punishments by the Court, NS defaulters who are still NS-liable will have to serve NS.

Column: 79

SUBLETTING OF HAWKER STALLS

16 **Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng** asked the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources (a) if his Ministry will review the current practice of allowing hawker centre stall holders to sublet their rented stalls; and (b) how the Ministry intends to curb the potential high profiteering and resultant price increase that occur as a result of the subletting practice.

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan : Under our current policy, stallholders of subsidised rental stalls are not permitted to sublet their stalls.

For non-subsidised stalls, limited subletting is allowed since the stallholders are theoretically not enjoying a subsidy. However, we must avoid a situation where persons tender and sub-let the stalls without any intention to operate them personally.

Our ministry will be reviewing the subletting policy to tighten the conditions under which stalls can be sublet. We will announce the new measures when the review is completed.

Column: 79

MEDICATION ASSISTANCE FUND

17 **Assoc Prof Fatimah Lateef** asked the Minister for Health whether the Medication Assistance Fund can be expanded to include medications prescribed by non-hospital clinics, such as private clinics and general practitioners, as some non-standard/non-generic medications can be costly as the pharmaceutical industry evolves.

Mr Gan Kim Yong : The Government provides subsidies for drugs in the public healthcare sector to help improve the affordability of commonly used medications. The list of subsidised medications, known as the Standard Drug List, contains drugs that have been assessed to be cost-effective and essential. This list is reviewed on a yearly basis to take into account changes in clinical practice and advances in medical science.

The Medication Assistance Fund (MAF) helps eligible patients pay for expensive drugs that are not in the Standard Drug List but have been assessed to be clinically necessary, and covers conditions, such as cancer and heart failure. MOH has been regularly reviewing and adding more drugs to the MAF list since its launch in August 2010, and increased the size of the fund accordingly. To ensure appropriate use of the MAF, clinical controls and approvals are put in place to assess the eligibility of the patients and to ensure that the drugs prescribed are clinically necessary and appropriate for the treatment of the patient's condition.

MOH has already expanded healthcare subsidies beyond the public sector to means-tested patients in the private sector, through the Primary Care Partnership Scheme. This subsidy lowers the total bill for patients, including the cost of drugs used, so that they can get affordable, subsidised care by the general practitioners (GP). As MAF was further enhanced in October 2011, we will need to consider further expansion of its scope, and the possibility of access by the private sector carefully, after reviewing our experience.

Column: 80

PUBLIC-SECTOR DOCTORS LEAVING FOR PRIVATE SECTOR

(Average age)

18 **Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song** asked the Minister for Health what is the average age of public-sector doctors leaving for private practice and how this figure compares with that of ten years ago.

Mr Gan Kim Yong : The average age of doctors leaving the public healthcare clusters for private sector increased slightly from 35 years old in 2001 to 36 years old in 2010. This is an estimate based on doctors who had indicated 'joining private sector' or 'personal reasons' as their reasons for leaving and excluded doctors who left due to transfer within public sector, retirement, contract lapse, termination of service, change of occupation, going overseas, family or health issues, as well as those who did not put down any reasons.

Column: 80

DIRECT SCHOOL ADMISSION PROGRAMME

(Students admitted due to sports achievements)

19 **Mr Hri Kumar Nair** asked the Minister for Education in each of the years from 2009 to 2011 (a) how many students gained admission into secondary schools through sports under the Direct School Admission (DSA) programme; (b) what sports were these students accepted for, giving a breakdown in numbers for each sport; and (c) what percentage of places in independent schools and schools offering Integrated Programmes were taken up by students under the DSA programme.

Mr Heng Swee Keat : The Direct School Admission (DSA) scheme, introduced in 2004, seeks to promote holistic education by recognising a more diverse range of student achievements and talents as criteria for school admissions, other than performance at the national examinations. Under the DSA scheme, participating schools are given the flexibility to admit students on the basis of their strengths in stated niche areas where the school has programmes to further develop the students' talents.

In the last three years between 2009 and 2011, an average of 870 students were admitted to secondary school through sports via the DSA scheme. The sports for which the most students were admitted via the DSA scheme were basketball, badminton, table-tennis, track & field and volleyball. The number of students admitted under each individual talent area, whether sports or performing arts, basketball or badminton, has varied from year to year, depending on the range of talent exhibited by the students who apply and the number of niche areas offered by the schools.

Between 2009 and 2011, an average of 7% of places in the independent schools and schools offering Integrated Programmes were taken up by students with sporting excellence under DSA. The majority of the places in these schools are available for students who participate under the Secondary One Posting Exercise.

Column: 81

Overall, DSA has served to broaden the definition of success and promote holistic education by reducing the emphasis on national examination results. MOE will continue to develop multiple pathways to cater to the different educational needs of our children.

Column: 81

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENT IN PRESCHOOL SECTOR

20 **Mr Yee Jenn Jong** asked the Minister for Education (a) what is the breakdown of the proposed \$290 million investment by the Ministry in the preschool sector over the next five years in terms of (i) investment in facilities; (ii) manpower development; and (iii) other significant areas; and (b) what is the breakdown by recipient organisations of the earlier investment of \$150 million in this preschool sector over the past five years.

Mr Heng Swee Keat : The proposed investment of \$290 million will be used to raise the quality, accessibility and affordability of pre-school education.

We expect about two-thirds of the investment to be in enhancing teacher quality, through support for professional upgrading and development, and the attraction and retention of qualified candidates as kindergarten teachers.

The remaining one-third will go towards enhancing pre-school programme quality, including through the Pre-school Innovation Grant and the Experimental Kindergarten at Temasek Polytechnic, and raising the quality of management, particularly in helping more kindergartens attain the standards in the Singapore Pre-school Accreditation Framework (SPARK).

In the past five years, the focus of MOE's funding is to support not-for-profit kindergartens, which cater to all races and attract students from the lower- and middle-income groups.

Column: 81

SINGLE-SESSION SCHOOLS

(Update on progress of implementation)

21 **Mr Lim Biow Chuan** asked the Minister for Education to date how many schools have introduced single-session hours and what is the progress on the plan to have all primary schools adopt single-session hours by 2016.

Mr Heng Swee Keat : By 2012, 95 out of 180 (53%) primary schools will be operating single-session. This is an increase from the 76 schools that were operating single-session in 2009, when MOE accepted the Primary Education Review and Implementation (PERI) Committee's recommendation to move all primary schools to single-session model.

In addition, 25 schools are currently undergoing upgrading, and 17 schools will commence upgrading from 2013, to facilitate their transition to single session.

MOE targets to facilitate the transition of the majority of Government primary schools to single-session by 2016.

Column: 82

YONG SIEW TOH CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC

(Breakdown of foreign and local students in the school population)

22 **Ms Sylvia Lim** asked the Minister for Education in respect of the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music (a) what is the current composition of the undergraduate student population, segmented between Singapore citizens, permanent residents and others; (b) how many of the foreign students are self-paying and how many are on scholarship; (c) how are the scholarships funded; and (d) what are the terms of the scholarships awarded to foreign students.

Mr Heng Swee Keat : The Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music (YSTCM) was established to provide a high-quality educational pathway for students who are talented both academically and musically, and to support Singapore's development as a top global city. It aims to attract and groom talented musician from Singapore and the region who would contribute further to the development of the Arts in Singapore.

Currently, Singaporeans comprise one-fifth of YSTCM's intake of about 50 students per year, with international students (IS) forming the rest. This trend of a high proportion of IS is also seen in many top Conservatories around the world, such as the Peabody Institute at Johns Hopkins and the Royal College of Music in the UK.

The YSTCM continuously strives to attract more Singaporean students. In fact, the offer rates for Singaporean applicants are currently higher than that for non-Singaporean applicants.

With the increased opportunities and pathways available for Singaporeans to pursue music at the pre-tertiary level, such as the expansion of the Music Elective Programme and the establishment of the School of the Arts, we expect the pool of Singaporean talent qualifying for YSTCM to grow.

All students enrolled in YSTCM are on some form of scholarship. These scholarships are mainly funded from the income of the Conservatory's endowment which has been built up from donations. All IS are required to serve a three-year service obligation.

Column: 82

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR KINDERGARTEN FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME

23 **Mr Yee Jenn Jong** asked the Acting Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports (a) if he can provide the list of preschool organisations that are currently eligible for the Kindergarten Financial Assistance Scheme (KiFAS) for low-income families; (b) what is the rationale for the kindergarten eligibility criteria for KiFAS; and (c) whether the KiFAS eligibility can be extended to private preschool operators and not-for-profit religious or racial groups.

Mr Chan Chun Sing : The Kindergarten Financial Assistance Scheme (KiFAS) seeks to ensure that kindergarten education remains affordable and accessible for children from lower and lower-middle income families. Families with a monthly household income of \$3,500 and below can apply for KiFAS. Different levels of subsidies, of up to \$108 per month, are provided to these families. Depending on the kindergarten fee, families earning \$1,500 and below may co-pay as little as \$2 per month.

Column: 83

Eligible children can receive KiFAS subsidies at kindergartens that are registered with the Ministry of Education (MOE), are non-profit and secular in nature, and are in a good financial position to provide

quality preschool education on a sustainable and affordable basis.

There are presently about 240 kindergartens where families can apply for KiFAS subsidies. These kindergartens provide a range of nursery to kindergarten programmes, and are well distributed across various locations in Singapore. The list of these kindergartens can be found on the MCYS website. Parents can also approach the Community Development Councils and Family Service Centres for assistance on eligible kindergartens.

MCYS regularly reviews this and other funding and support schemes to improve the accessibility and affordability of pre-school education, especially to the lower income groups.

ANNEXES

VERNACULAR SPEECHES