

**Volume 79  
No. 7**



**Friday  
18th February, 2005**

# **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES SINGAPORE OFFICIAL REPORT CONTENTS**

**Permission to Members to be Absent (Cols. 588-589)**

**Assents to Bills Passed (Cols. 589-590)**

**President's Address (Col. 590)**

**(Address of Thanks)**

**(Announcement by Mr Speaker)**

**Oral Answers to Questions (Cols. 590-635)**

**1. HDB resale flats (Cols. 590-595)**

**("Cashback" deals)**

**2. Town Councils' sinking funds (Cols. 595-596)**

**(Use for Lift Upgrading Programme)**

**3. HDB flats (Cols. 596-602)**

**(Resale levy)**

**4. State land (Cols. 602-605)**

**(Prohibition signs)**

**5. Aid for Aceh (Cols. 605-610)**

**(Update)**

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES SINGAPORE

## OFFICIAL REPORT

### TENTH PARLIAMENT

---

#### PART I OF SECOND SESSION

#### VOLUME 79

---

*Friday, 18th February, 2005*

*The House met at 1.30 pm*

PRESENT:

- Mr SPEAKER (Mr Abdullah Tarmugi (East Coast)).
- Mr Ahmad Khalis Bin Abdul Ghani (Hong Kah).
- Dr Ahmad Mohd Magad (Pasir Ris-Punggol).
- Mr Ang Mong Seng (Hong Kah).
- Dr Balaji Sadasivan (Ang Mo Kio), Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts and Ministry of Health.
- Mr Alexander Chan Meng Wah (Nominated Member).
- Mr Chan Soo Sen (Joo Chiat), Minister of State, Ministry of Education.
- Mr Chay Wai Chuen (Tanjong Pagar).
- Dr John Chen Seow Phun (Hong Kah).
- Mr Chew Heng Ching (East Coast), Deputy Speaker.
- Mr Steve Chia Kiah Hong (Non-Constituency Member).
- Mr Chiam See Tong (Potong Pasir).
- Assoc. Prof. Chin Tet Yung (Sembawang).
- Mr Charles Chong (Pasir Ris-Punggol).
- Dr Chong Weng Chiew (Tanjong Pagar).
- Mr Davinder Singh (Bishan-Toa Payoh).
- Mr Arthur Fong (West Coast).
- Mr Cedric Foo Chee Keng (West Coast), Minister of State, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of National Development.
- Mr Gan Kim Yong (Holland-Bukit Panjang).
- Mr Andy Gan Lai Chiang (Marine Parade).
- Dr Geh Min (Nominated Member).
- Mr Goh Chok Tong (Marine Parade), Senior Minister, Prime Minister's Office.
- Mdm Halimah Yacob (Jurong).
- Mr Hawazi Daipi (Sembawang), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Minister for Manpower.
- Mr Heng Chee How (Jalan Besar), Minister of State, Ministry of Trade and Industry.
- Mdm Ho Geok Choo (West Coast).
- Assoc. Prof. Ho Peng Kee (Nee Soon East), Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Law and Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Mr Inderjit Singh (Ang Mo Kio), Deputy Government Whip.
- Ms Indranee Rajah (Tanjong Pagar).

*Oral Answers to Questions*

the criteria which the school would assess the students whether or not they will be readmitted to school.

I would also like to know what is the Ministry of Education's broad guidelines to the schools in terms of readmitting students back to school.

**Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam:** I do not have the exact data on the numbers who have not been readmitted, despite coming forward and saying they want to be readmitted, but it is a very small number. I can assure Members of that. There will be such cases of people who have not genuinely turned over a new leaf, whose parents feel that they should come back to school although the student has not reformed his behaviour. Some of the cases of students who dropped out of school – for that matter, students who are expelled from school – are cases where they would pose a danger to the rest of the school community and would pose disruption to the rest of the students if they are in school. So, we have got to be very clear as to whether they are suitable for readmission to the school – have they changed, are they serious about their studies, are they willing to conform to school rules and to be a responsible member of the school community. Those are not trivial questions. Fortunately, the numbers of students who want to come back and are unable to gain readmission are very, very few. Sometimes, it is difficult to go back to their old school community because of what had happened before, but we will find them another school.

**Mdm Halimah Yacob:** Sir, there are students who dropped out of school, either because they do not wish to go back to school or they are not readmitted, but yet, they may not have the essential qualifications to go into ITE or other such programmes. Are there any other programmes available presently to hold

such students in the event? I think it is essential that we ensure they have some basic skills, whether it is skills for employment, lifeskills or whatever. Is there a bridging programme or other programmes for them?

**Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam:** Yes, first, we still have the vocational training centres and we do refer a few of such pupils to those centres every year. Second, some of the external agencies do conduct not just counselling, in a general sense, but work skills counselling as well to help prepare them to get on with life and try to do well despite circumstances.

#### **ASSISTANCE TO NEEDY STUDENTS AND PUBLICATION OF GENERAL EXAMINATION RESULTS**

7. **Mr Wee Siew Kim** asked the Minister for Education (a) how many households with school-going children have a per capita income of \$300 or less; (b) how many households with young school-going children have retired parents; (c) what are the current assistance schemes available to them; and (d) has there been any study to show the performance in school of such needy students compared to the performance of the Singapore students in general.

8. **Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang** asked the Minister for Education if his Ministry will publish from now on all general examination results, including Primary Six, GCE "N", "O" and "A" levels, analysed by family income or, if by family income is not possible, by type of housing as well as by race.

**The Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education (Mr Hawazi Daipi) (for the Minister for Education):** Sir, may I take Question Nos. 7 and 8 together, on behalf of the Minister for Education?

**Mr Speaker:** Yes.

*Oral Answers to Questions*

**Mr Hawazi Daipi:** Since 1988, MOE has been releasing data on educational performance of students of the various ethnic groups annually. This is in response to the requests from the various self-help groups that conduct targeted education programmes for students from the respective communities. It also provides a useful gauge for the different communities on how their children have performed in the national examinations.

**Prof. Png** has asked for MOE to publish examination results according to the family income group of students, or, as a proxy, by housing type. The Ministry does not collect data on the family income of students. We do have data on the housing types of students. As is to be expected, there is some correlation between academic performance of students and housing type, taken on average. This is not surprising because housing type tends to be related to parents' education levels, particularly amongst our younger families. In fact, parents' education correlates more strongly with academic performance than housing type does.

MOE does not plan to publicly release the annual examination results according to housing type or other socio-economic indicators on an annual basis. However, MOE releases information on the educational performance of students based on various socio-economic indicators to the self-help groups where they find it useful in planning their programmes and determining the kind of support they should give to targeted groups such as underperforming students and potential drop-outs.

Studies and evaluations by MOE and schools suggest that many factors affect the academic performance of a pupil, including the support he receives from the family. Most important of all, however, is his aptitude and his attitudes or desire to achieve. This is consistent with findings in studies in many other countries.

Mr Wee Siew Kim had also asked about young students with retired parents. MOE survey data indicates that less than 0.1% or 50 Primary One students have a retired parent.

We will continue to help every child, through our schools, self-help groups, CDCs and VWOs, regardless of his family background. The MOE Financial Assistance Scheme grants students from low-income homes waiver of school fees and exemption from miscellaneous fees. Students under this scheme also receive free textbooks. Needy students can also receive additional financial support from the School Advisory/Management Committee (SAC/SMC), the Community Development Councils (CDCs) and Family Service Centres. Many School Advisory Committees and School Management Committees provide needy students with pocket money, bus stamps, free meals, stationery and uniforms.

**Mr Wee Siew Kim (Ang Mo Kio):** Sir, a lot of our schemes of help from different Ministries actually target at specific groups, like young parents with small families or young parents with very low education and hoping that the secondary generation gets help. But there are two groups that sometimes fall out of all these benchmarks: one, people who entered parenthood late and they have very young children – there are only 50 of them, as mentioned – and, I guess, the other group is young parents with very large families and a very large number of children. Sometimes, there is no proper way to address this problem, and I hope that maybe the Ministry can look into ensuring that these children have enough resources so that they can stay in school.

**Mr Hawazi Daipi:** Thank you for the suggestion. As I said earlier, there are already many schemes offered by schools, Ministry of Education, as well as voluntary organisations, and CDCs to help pupils

*Oral Answers to Questions*

who come from poorer families. For pupils who come from families which may not be able to support them academically, there are already national programmes in school so that they can learn at their own pace, they can pick up language skills in an environment in which they can learn comfortably, so that they would be able to proceed up to primary level, complete primary education and proceed to secondary level.

I would say, generally, that there are already a lot of schemes out there in the community by self-help groups, and CDCs and families can pick up some of these assistance schemes suitable for them and where they are eligible.

**Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang (Nominated Member):** Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the Senior Parliamentary Secretary for responding to my question. The Senior Parliamentary Secretary has told the House that, in fact, the most important factor in determining students' education performance is not race, it is not housing type; it is parental educational qualifications. In that case, why are we publishing statistics based on race? Why do we not publish the statistics based on parental educational qualifications?

I ask this question, Sir, because every year we see these "A" level results, "O" level results, "N" levels, Primary Six, and so on, published based on race. It gives the impression that certain races are not doing as well as other races. But if the real reason is that for certain races, parents are not as well educated as other parents, let us make that the focus of the reporting and then let us make that the focus of our policy efforts; or else people will get the wrong impression that it is a race problem.

**Mr Hawazi Daipi:** Sir, as a matter of policy, the Ministry of Education will help every student, including those who come from poorer families, to succeed in

education and to enjoy learning. We publish information on educational performance based on race because self-help groups, which help their own particular communities, think that it is useful for them to have the information so that they can target their assistance schemes for the various groups within their own communities. Yes, generally, the performance of students correlates with the academic background of their parents. But that is a known fact almost everywhere in the world. But what we have done is to help self-help groups to assist their own community, children in their own community, with the information that we have released to them.

**Assoc. Prof. Ong Soh Khim (Nominated Member):** Sir, with respect to the recent media focus on foreign students doing well in our education system, ie, primary and secondary levels, would the Ministry consider publishing the results and analyse them with respect to the nationality of the students?

**Mr Hawazi Daipi:** Sir, I am not sure whether that will be useful. Then there may be requests for information about performance of students in Ang Mo Kio and various other districts. Is there any significance to that? What we have generally seen is that Singaporean students have benefited from the competition that they have faced in the classrooms and schools, as a result of the presence of non-Singaporean friends. I am not sure whether it will benefit them. We will consider this if it is useful.

**Mr Low Thia Khiang:** Does the Senior Parliamentary Secretary agree that what is deemed not useful or beneficial from the point of view of the Ministry may be useful and beneficial to others who are interested in the subject, in terms of statistics?

**Mr Hawazi Daipi:** I would generally say that what we think is beneficial would be

*Oral Answers to Questions*

[Mr HAWAZI DAIPi]

beneficial to the students and people that we serve in our schools. We release information on the students' performance by race because the self-help groups would be able to help reach out to them with targeted programmes so that the students would be able to improve. That is useful. But if the information can give a wrong impression that, for example, foreign students are performing better at the expense of local students, then I do not think it will help anybody at all. I am just citing an example of how information may be useful or not useful.

**Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang:** Sir, the Senior Parliamentary Secretary has responded to my supplementary question by saying that self-help groups have asked for this race-based information. But this is a somewhat circular argument because self-help groups were set up precisely because it was thought that race was the major factor in poor education performance. If indeed it is not the major factor, then I feel that the whole basis of this argument falls apart.

**Mr Hawazi Daipi:** Sir, I do not think we are here to argue whether race is a major factor affecting students' performance. Race may correlate with educational backgrounds and socio-economic status of the families. But race may not necessarily be, and I believe it is not, the major factor affecting the performance of students in school. So I do not see any reason why we need to argue about this, and by association, we should release information based on the educational backgrounds of the parents.

## OLDER WORKERS

### (Increase of employment opportunities)

9. **Mr Ong Ah Heng** asked the Minister for Manpower whether his Ministry has

any plans to encourage employers to employ and retain older workers as well as to increase their work opportunities.

**The Minister for Manpower (Dr Ng Eng Hen):** Sir, Mr Ong has asked whether my Ministry has any plans to encourage employers to employ and retain older workers as well as to increase their work opportunities.

Let me, first, say that, as a matter of principle and this is a consensus from all three social partners – the tripartite consensus – that workers should be hired based on their ability to do the job regardless of age, gender, race or other attributes which are not related to their performance on the job. However, we also recognise that as our population grows older, we will need to facilitate opportunities for Singaporeans to work longer.

Based on these two considerations, we, together with NTUC, have actively pushed for workers' skills upgrading and job redesign. In other words, the strategy is, yes, we need to be non-discriminatory in hiring practices and we need to skill up, especially those who are vulnerable. Between January and November 2004, the Skills Redevelopment Programme (SRP) supported close to 35,000 training places out of which approximately 60% of the people trained under this programme were aged 40 and above.

The Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) will continue to expand our targeted training and skills upgrading programmes to help older workers pick up new skills in order to stay relevant in the changing workplace.

We will also continue to promote Flexible and Performance-Based Wage Systems that reward workers based on their output. The Seniority-Based Wage Structure works against older workers and makes them more prone to retrenchments

*Oral Answers to Questions*

[Mr HAWAZI DAIPI]

practitioners when assessing the amount of compensation for cases involving permanent disablement. It is a practice of medical practitioners to give an assessment on the percentage of permanent incapacitation only after the injured worker's condition has stabilised. So a medical report is filed after the permanent incapacitation has stabilised, and that may take time. Serious injuries will take a longer time to heal and, hence, the injured worker has to wait longer to get an assessment.

When the Commissioner makes an assessment, all parties involved, ie, the injured worker, his employer and his insurer, are given the opportunity to raise objections. Further investigations or medical reassessments would be required should an objection be raised. If settlement terms cannot be reached through conciliation, the case would be referred to the Labour Court for adjudication. Pre-trial conferences and hearings would then be conducted by the Labour Court to assess the compensation and to order the liable party to pay the compensation.

For fatal cases involving foreign workers, time is also needed to establish and locate their dependants. In cases where the documents establishing the relationship of the dependants are written in other languages, translation work is needed. This will add to the processing time.

**Mdm Halimah Yacob:** Sir, can the Ministry try to expedite the process, particularly for foreign workers, although I understand the steps that are needed to be taken. Because of the hardship that it causes to the worker, he has to remain in Singapore without any means of sustenance. If at least the process is shortened and more efforts are made to try and process their claim much faster, I think that will reduce their hardship.

**Mr Hawazi Daipi:** Sir, I can assure the hon. Member that the Ministry officers always do that. They will try their best to expedite. There is no reason to delay the compensation or settlement of the claim. But we will do more than that. The entire process, we understand, takes a long time, and it is quite tedious. The Ministry is reviewing this process and, if necessary, we will amend the Workmen's Compensation Act to make the process more efficient, without compromising fairness to all parties concerned.

## EMPLOYMENT OF FOREIGN WORKERS

### (Publication of statistics)

**11. Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang** asked the Minister for Manpower if his Ministry will publish statistics on the employment of foreign workers by industry sector, occupation, and employment status (employment pass/work permit), for the benefit of our citizens planning job moves and for the benefit of researchers.

**Mr Hawazi Daipi (for the Minister for Manpower):** Sir, MOM published a paper on "Employment Trend and Structure" in May 2004 providing statistics, by broad sectors, on local and foreign workers' employment changes, as well as employment levels. The Ministry will update the data for release on an annual basis. The 2004 data will be released in the upcoming Labour Market Report on 15th March 2005. This will add to the wide range of statistical information on the labour market that MOM publishes regularly.

For job seekers, the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) publishes the *Job Seeker's Guides* and *JobsWatch*, which contain information on employment prospects for different sectors, and highlight occupations in demand. All these reports are available on MOM and WDA's websites.

*Bill Introduced*

Medisave Accounts in the past. To help these people, the Government has, from time to time, topped up the Medisave balances of Singaporeans, with higher amounts to the older citizens. We will continue to do so if the budget position allows. In fact, this is one of my budget wishes for this year. I hope I will be lucky!

**Dr Lily Neo:** Sir, in the recent MediShield revamp, there was no change to the age limit claim for MediShield. Will the Minister consider raising this age limit claim beyond the age of 80, in view of our ageing population?

**Mr Speaker:** Ten seconds, Mr Khaw.

**Mr Khaw Boon Wan:** We do review the maximum cut-off age every now and then. I think it used to be 70, then raised to 75 and, a few years ago, to 80. As life expectancy increases, we will take that into account. But in the market place, there are insurance policies which cover beyond 80. NTUC Income is one of them, and I would rather let the elderly people decide. At that age, they should be quite wise to decide for themselves whether they want to pay extra high premiums, because some of these products are not cheap.

3.00 pm

**Mr Speaker:** Order. End of Question Time.

*[Pursuant to Standing Order No. 22(3), Written Answers to Question Nos. 16-17, 23-24, 26 and 28-29 on the Order Paper are reproduced in the Appendix\*. Question Nos. 15, 18-22, 25, 27 and 30-32 have been postponed to the sitting of Parliament on 28th February 2005.]*

**SUPPLY BILL**

"to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund and the Development Fund

of the sums necessary to meet the estimated expenditure for the financial year 1st April 2005 to 31st March 2006 (both dates inclusive)",

recommendation of President signified; presented by the Prime Minister and Minister for Finance (Mr Lee Hsien Loong); read the First time; to be read a Second time after the conclusion of proceedings on the Estimates of Expenditure for FY 2005/2006, and to be printed.

**DEBATE ON BUDGET STATEMENT**

**(Business Motion)**

Resolved,

That, notwithstanding the Standing Orders, the debate on the Budget Statement shall resume on Monday, 28th February 2005. – [Mr Wong Kan Seng].

**FIRST SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 1ST APRIL 2004 TO 31ST MARCH 2005**

**(Paper Cmd. 1 of 2005)**

Order read for consideration in Committee of Supply [Allotted Day].

**[Mr Speaker in the Chair]**

**The Chairman:** First Supplementary Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 1st April 2004 to 31st March 2005, contained in Paper Cmd. 1 of 2005.

I shall deal first with the head of expenditure in respect of which an amendment stands on the Order Paper Supplement.

Head L, Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources. **Prof. Ivan Png** is not here.



## WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

### FALSE STATEMENTS BY DIRECTORS OF LISTED COMPANIES

1. **Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang** asked the Senior Minister what actions have MAS and SGX taken against directors of listed companies who make false statements of their experience and educational qualifications as in the recent case of Panpac Media with regard to Chief Executive Officer Chen Xiaotao and the earlier case of Media Ring with regard to director Richard Li.

**Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam (for the Senior Minister):**

The actions that MAS and SGX take against directors of listed companies who make false statements of their experience and educational qualifications will depend on the circumstances of each case.

Under SGX's continuous disclosure obligations, the appointment of any director, chief executive officer or other key appointments must be announced immediately. The announcement must include details of the person's particulars, work experience, other directorships and shareholdings. If there is a false or misleading statement, SGX will consider if the erroneous information had materially affected the share price or established a false impression of the price or volume in the issuer's securities. Depending on these facts, SGX may warn or reprimand offenders.

SGX may also refer the matter to MAS if it forms the view that the false and misleading statement was one that could have induced dealing in or affected the market price of securities, in breach of section 199 of the Securities and Futures Act ("the SFA") or one that was fraudulent and had induced others to deal in securities, in breach of section 200 of the SFA. In these instances, where sufficient basis for investigation exists, and depending on the severity of the contravention, the case may either be subject to criminal enforcement action by CAD or civil penalty action by the MAS.

Under the criminal regime, offenders of section 199 or 200 of the SFA may be fined up to \$250,000 or imprisoned for up to seven years or both. Under the civil penalty regime, a civil penalty of an amount not exceeding three times any profit gained or loss avoided, subject to a minimum of \$50,000 for an individual or \$100,000 for a corporation may be imposed. In the event where there is no profit made or loss avoided, a civil penalty of between \$50,000 and \$2 million may be imposed.

In addition, directors of listed companies who make false or misleading statements of their experience and educational qualification in an initial public offering prospectus breaching section 253 of the SFA could be subject to criminal enforcement action. A breach of section 253 arises where the false or misleading statement is materially adverse from the point of view of the investor. Offenders of section 253 of SFA may be fined up to \$150,000 or imprisoned for up to two years or both.

### REJECTED HDB RESALE FLAT APPLICATIONS

2. **Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan** asked the Minister for National Development how many cases of HDB resale flat applications have been rejected since 2004 because the buyer is unable to get HDB subsidised financing as well as bank financing due to his credit history.