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**Tuesday
8th March, 2005**

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES SINGAPORE OFFICIAL REPORT CONTENTS

Permission to Members to be Absent (Col. 1864)

**Estimates of Expenditure for the Financial Year 1st April 2005, to 31st March 2006
(Cols. 1864-2048)**

Considered in Committee of Supply [5th Allotted Day]

Head V - Ministry of Trade and Industry (Cols. 1865-1927)

**Head L - Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources
(Cols. 1927-1996)**

Head O - Ministry of Health (Cols. 1996-2048)

Committee of Supply Reporting Progress (Cols. 2048-2049)

Adjournment (Col. 2050)

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES SINGAPORE

OFFICIAL REPORT

TENTH PARLIAMENT

PART I OF SECOND SESSION

VOLUME 79

Tuesday, 8th March, 2005

The House met at 12.00 noon

PRESENT:

Mr SPEAKER (Mr Abdullah Tarmugi (East Coast)).

Mr Ahmad Khalis Bin Abdul Ghani (Hong Kah).

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).

Dr Chong Weng Chiew (Tanjong Pagar).

Mr Davinder Singh (Bishan-Toa Payoh).

Mr Arthur Fong (West Coast).

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).

Prof. S Jayakumar (East Coast), Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Law.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan (Tanjong Pagar), Minister for Health.

Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan (Hong Kah).

suppliers, either Malaysia or Indonesia, and these supplies come in the form of pipelines which require quite a heavy investment upfront. So these companies that negotiated have to take these factors into consideration. Mr Chiam noted that the Government is looking into the viability of setting up a LNG terminal in Singapore. This would bring in more potential suppliers and we think that this would give us greater leverage to bring in more competitive prices for our gas supplies.

The next area that I would like to cover is the importance of R&D in the upgrading of our manufacturing. As we move into the next phase, a strong R&D base will give us the intellectual wherewithal to undertake more sophisticated and higher value-added manufacturing in Singapore and anchor key projects here.

Members would have known the various R&D facilities that we are able to attract here over the last five years, as we develop our R&D capabilities. We do so through the science and technology (or S&T) plans. Prof. Ivan Png asked about our S&T 2000 and our S&T 2005 plans and their outcomes. Basically, we are moving into the next stage. In the early stage, when we were attracting MNCs to set up manufacturing base in Singapore, our main attraction was the availability of skilled manpower, engineers, technicians and mechanics. As we move to the next phase of the brain industry, our new competitive advantage must be in the higher level of talents that we can attract and this would mean more research scientists and engineers.

If you look at the progress that we have embarked on, I must confess that we are a relatively latecomer in the R&D scene. In 1995, we barely spent 1.15% of our GDP on R&D. Through our various S&T efforts, the gross expenditure on R&D has risen to 1.88% in the year 2000, and then to 2.15% of GDP in

2003. I think Dr Tan Sze Wee has given the figures for the other developed countries. And Members will observe that we are on the lower end of this R&D scale. In terms of the manpower development, we have also made some improvements in the number of research scientists and engineers per 10,000 labour force. This has increased from 48 in 1995 to 66 in 2000 and further to 79 in 2003. About half of our research scientists and engineers are post-graduates.

Members will agree with me that if we want to upgrade our economy, one of the key strategies we must pursue more vigorously is our S&T capabilities and our need to raise the level of expenditure on research, and target this research expenditure in selective areas where we can take full advantage and build up our competitiveness. So last year, the Government set up a Ministerial Committee on Research and Development, headed by DPM Tony Tan. This committee was formed to review the strategic direction for R&D in Singapore. From its deliberations and visits to research organisations, both locally and overseas, the committee has identified a few areas in our R&D landscape which can be improved upon. For example, in niche areas of strategic economic importance to Singapore, we need to deepen and broaden our research capabilities. We also need to help our local enterprise enhance their competitiveness by improving their technological capabilities. In addition, we need to intensify our efforts to further engage the private sector in R&D.

The Ministerial Committee will conclude its study in June this year and its recommendations will set the broad strategic directions for Singapore's R&D landscape for the future. MTI would then use this to draw up the science and technology plan for 2006 to 2010. The S&T 2010 Plan will identify the plans and

[Mr LIM HNG KIANG]

programmes that we should undertake to carry out the R&D strategies for our economy. In preparing the S&T Plan, there will be extensive consultations with the various Ministries, universities, research bodies, economic agencies and industries. The plan would be made public in due course.

Let me just summarise what we are planning to do. First, we need to raise the level of expenditure in S&T. That is the only way to compete. In the past, we have been fairly frugal, in fact to the point of being stingy in developing our R&D capabilities. Now, we realise that if we want to compete, we have to be bolder and be prepared to invest more. But we have to make sure our investments are better targeted, that means, (1) if we want to set up and build up the research institutes in Singapore, we cannot do everything. Therefore, we have to identify certain areas where we are likely to have a competitive advantage; (2) we should not do it all by ourselves in the Government. We should work with the industry. If the industry is prepared to put in the money, I think that points the direction of where we should be investing and, therefore, our programmes in R&D will be directed towards gearing the industry to also spend and invest more in R&D; and (3) to build up the talent and the people to be able to support the R&D effort.

As I mentioned at the last sitting, it is not inexpensive to train research scientists. It costs about nearly a million dollars. But it is an investment that we have to do. Prof. Ong Soh Khim listed out all the risks in our investments. I must say that we have to take these risks. If we do not invest and build up our talent, we cannot expect people to set up R&D facilities in Singapore. So the Ministry fully supports A*STAR's efforts to build up this flow of talent. A*STAR has done

a very good job in identifying these people to take up a research career. If at any point, especially after the first degree, we find them unsuitable or they do not perform well, then of course they will not continue to the PhD segment of their studies. But this is something that we have to do.

Let me round up with a few specific responses. First, the Economic Development Assistance Scheme (EDAS). Prof. Ivan Png asked about the return on investment on the EDAS. Let me clarify that EDAS is not an equity fund and therefore there is no ROI. The EDAS is a range of programmes which comprise both grants and loans. Therefore, we do not use ROI to measure these programmes.

Let me just summarise. As we go into the next stage of our economic development, it is very important for us to make sure we build up enterprises in Singapore, both local and foreign. That is the key to generating wealth and employment. The SMEs play a very important part in our strategy. We have a range of programmes. I am sure we can do more.

Both Mr Inderjit Singh and Mr Lawrence Leow suggested some adjustments to the financial schemes that we have for the SMEs, even though we are extending practically about \$600 million worth of assistance to SMEs. I am prepared to review these schemes to make them more effective. And I welcome the suggestions by Mr Lawrence Leow to make them both flexible so as to be able to be more effective to the wide range of SMEs that we face out there.

Can I now ask Mr Heng Chee How to help clarify some of the other issues raised by Members?

The Minister of State for Trade and Industry (Mr Heng Chee How): Sir, I would

[Mr LIM HNG KIANG]

build up an eco-system that allows new bio-tech companies to sprout out. This is not easy, but it is something that we are growing, and I think Dr Tan Sze Wee will realise the difficulties of growing bio-tech companies. Three, we try to anchor some of the research facilities of the big pharmaceutical companies here in Singapore. And, for that, our strategy is to have biopolis, which gives them the facilities to come in, plug and play, so that they do not have to invest so much in setting up the infrastructure. I think we have had several successes.

So when we look at the investments that we have put in, and the progress that we have made in five years, I think we have done reasonably well. Part of this is greater investment in R&D. If one looks back, I think we were a bit slow. If one looks at countries like Taiwan and others, I think they have invested more heavily in their people and research talent pool. I think we are a bit slow but, as I have said, we have caught up somewhat over the last five years, but I do not think we should be complacent. We still have a long way to go.

On Dr Tan's question about SEEDS and the grant being limited, I agree with him. Bio-tech research is a very expensive enterprise. If we want to encourage new start-ups in bio-tech, we have got to find a way in which the environment allows them to do so. But we have to be quite realistic. Most bio-techs, beyond a certain stage, have to be bought out by the big pharmaceutical companies, and they could latch on to big scale clinical trials and major production. I think that has to be the evolution process of the bio-tech companies. Therefore, we will look at the quantum of SEEDS. If \$600,000 is not effective, we will have to see how this could be done.

Similarly, for the DMRC grants. Again, we have to be realistic. Clinical

research is a very difficult and long-drawn process and essentially it has to be done primarily in a hospital setting or in a specialist centre setting. But if this is too restrictive we will review the programme and extend it also to the private sector, especially if our private sector grows in capabilities and there are more private sector facilities or organisations that are able to band together and have a greater capability to undertake such a research.

So the number of scholars that we are providing nowadays, 100-150 A*STAR scholars, is not a very big investment. \$40-100 million a year is a drop in the ocean. I think one of the conclusions which I hope will come out in the June review by the R&D Committee is to give us a boost in our R&D efforts.

Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang: On SMEs, in his response during the Budget Debate, the Prime Minister mentioned that, in fact, the Government is one of the major purchasers in tenders under \$100,000 and SMEs are one of the major suppliers to the Government. I asked that the Government uses the public-people-partnership to outsource projects. I wish to ask again that the Government insists that all these PPP outsource providers use GeBiz for their procurement, because, when the Government outsources big projects, we do not want the opportunities for SMEs to become providers to the Government of goods and services to be closed out, because the outsource providers may not use such a transparent system as the Government is using now.

My second point is to thank the Minister for agreeing to publish the R&D 2006 Plan. That is a very good move. I only urge the Ministry, in planning R&D, to slice R&D into two parts. We must have pure R&D, as well as applied R&D. Let us not forget an important layer of R&D capability will be pure R&D, not necessarily tied to any particular industry

or project. This is of overall importance to R&D capability.

Mr Lim Hng Kiang: The R&D Committee, chaired by DPM Tony Tan, will cover the full spectrum of R&D, both the pure R&D undertaken by the universities and the other research institutes in the academic setting, as well as the applied R&D, which is really the responsibility of MTI, through our research institutes and collaborations with the industry. So it covers both areas. But we have to realise that in Singapore, our priority must be on applied R&D. That is my view because, whatever funds we have, I think a greater portion of that fund must be leveraged towards industry applications, economic development and generating jobs.

On the PPP, I accept **Prof. Ivan Png's** point. But let me again explain that the PPP that the Government promotes will be for some of the big projects. One of the best examples will be, say, an incinerator plant. I could not realistically see how that PPP project of an incinerator plant could be packaged, whether it is mandatory or not, that it makes itself available to local SMEs. As Heng Chee How explained in his speech, the best way forward for our local SMEs is to improve their capabilities, establish their own brands and compete, based on price, quality, competence and product delivery. To try and favour SMEs through a buy-local policy by the Government is not the way to go.

Tourism

Miss Penny Low (Pasir Ris-Punggol): Sir, Tourism Vision 2015 sets bold aims to double visitor arrivals, triple tourism receipts and add some 100,000 jobs to Singapore. I wonder how MTI intends to achieve this vision. To quote the Minister, "Where do we place our bets?" Sceptics would say, "Perhaps integrated resorts." However, having travelled to

some 45 countries, I ask myself what makes a place memorable. What makes me revisit it? Without a doubt, Eiffel Tower or Tower Bridge alone, will not lure me back. But it is the people, action and stories along the way that create the magic in the air. Does Singapore have that magic?

Sir, "Awe-struck by Chingay" was the *Sunday Times* headline that described our tourist experience. Lights, colours, sounds, festive cheers and, most of all, the kaleidoscope of races and styles coming together to celebrate a historically Chinese festival impressed tourists of our unity in diversity. Many wanted to learn more about Singapore's culture and racial harmony. People remember less of concrete skyscrapers, but more fondly of events and people. The event leaves a lasting memory with many stories to tell their friends and relatives back home.

Sir, this is the colour of our nation and our strength. Could we showcase this unique face of Singapore to the world? Should we capitalise on the very colours? In fact, could we go one step further and have a major fiesta every other month and make Singapore a cultural and fiesta capital of the world? With the \$2 billion Tourism Development Fund, I urge that we develop Singapore as an international fiesta capital city, which leverages on our people, city energy, hub concept, location, already world-class infrastructure, travel safety, kaleidoscope of culture, food, shopping, and mix of old and new, to give tourists a uniquely Singapore experience and leave them wanting more.

In fact, the advantages of a fiesta capital concept is aplenty. In terms of economic contribution, I have distributed an addendum, and I quote two examples. One, the Edinburgh International Festival in Scotland – three weeks of sizzling music, opera and dance. It attracts 2.6

Semakau Landfill

The Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts (Encik Yatiman Yusof): Mr Chairman, 10 years ago, the Government acquired Pulau Seking and Pulau Semakau and developed them into an offshore landfill which was operational about six years ago. A fortnight ago, I was fortunate to be able to visit the site on the courtesy of Assoc. Prof. Koo Tsai Kee.

In my life, I have seen how Kallang Basin, the area from Jalan Kolam Ayer to Lavender Street, had evolved from a dumping ground to a public housing and industrial estate and how Lorong Halus, another dumping ground, had attracted stray dogs and how residents who initially moved into Pasir Ris had to tolerate the odour coming out from the area.

Contrary to the general perception that a landfill is an unhygienic, smelly and dusty place, this offshore landfill, which I am told is as big as Sentosa, is a clean and nice place with the smell of fresh air from the blue sea filling our lungs. The special care taken during its construction has prevented leakages into the sea and the air. In this way, the maritime ecosystem is fully protected and the air is clean. More than that, Sir, the rejuvenated natural habitat of Pulau Semakau, with the replanted *bakau* trees and the mangrove mud flats, provided an attractive opportunity for the creative and productive use of the place.

2.30 pm

I have two questions to ask. Firstly, to what extent has the landfill been able to meet our current and future needs for waste disposal? Secondly, going beyond just a landfill, as Semakau/Seking is large enough an area, I would like to know what the Ministry has in mind in

maximising its potential for the benefit of Singaporeans.

Sir, I would like to venture to suggest that the island be developed into an intensive-recreational area. Facing an open sea, it could be developed into a seaports centre for those who love to go yachting, boating, sea-kayaking, wind surfing and even sports fishing. The untouched Semakau Island could be a unique place for nature lovers to view its fauna and flora. It could also be developed into a retreat for families and voluntary welfare organisation members. Sir, to do so, we need first of all to turn the place into a green island, which Seking is lacking.

Recreational Use of Reservoirs

Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang (Nominated Member): Sir, I must disclose an interest here. I am personally keen to bring my children to sail and row in our reservoirs.

I applaud the Ministry for opening up the reservoirs for water sports. However, I am concerned that the mechanism is too exclusive. Last year, I was so happy to read the Minister's speech that we could sail on Lower Seletar Reservoir. So I went to find out. What I found out was that I must pay \$10,000 entrance fee to join Seletar Country Club, then I could do my sailing. This, Sir, was very disappointing.

I urge the Ministry to open up the reservoirs to the public — truly open to the public — not just to a select few. I urge the Ministry to please make it a condition that when the reservoir is open to an operator, the facilities must be open to the public, not just to a few members.

Pollutant Standards Index (PSI) Reading

Mr Steve Chia Kiah Hong: Mr Chairman, Sir, the NEA currently

[Assoc. Prof. DR YAACOB IBRAHIM]

sumption. About 500 building owners have also achieved similar water savings under the Water Efficient Buildings programme. PUB intends to reach out to another 120,000 households and 200 building owners this year.

Our interest groups and NGOs have also been active in helping to engage the community. For example, the Restroom Association of Singapore has launched the “Happy Toilet” rating scheme to encourage building management to achieve high standard of cleanliness for their public toilets.

Sir, another commendable example is the Waterways Watch Society (WWS). On a Sunday morning last month, they took me on their small patrol boat up and down the Singapore River, and showed me how they picked up flotsam and other rubbish in the water. They have been doing so almost every Sunday in the Kallang Basin and Singapore River area. The WWS also gives presentations to schools and conducts beach clean ups to reach out to more people and cultivate the spirit of “keeping our waterways clean”.

My Ministry will continue therefore to work closely with the CDCs, Town Councils and CCCs to sustain various public outreach efforts, such as the Rat Attack, Mozzie Attack and other community programmes initiated under the banner of the Singapore’s OK campaign. We are quite comfortable with the current structure. We do not see the need for us to put everything together. But, certainly, where there are synergies to collaborate and to streamline, we will do so.

Sir, in support of the CDCs and CCCs in these efforts, we will provide appropriate funding support, which could amount to \$250,000 for all the CDCs and another \$420,000 for all the CCCs. In

addition, over the next twelve months, PUB will provide \$1 million towards its 3P – or people, public, private sectors – partnership programmes to engage more Singaporeans to appreciate, value and take ownership of our water resources. This is on top of the existing \$1 million 3P Partnership fund that NEA has set aside to help support the various 3P initiatives.

My Ministry continues to involve interest groups through various environmental events and activities, such as the Environmental Education Advisors Workshops and Clean and Green Week activities. NEA is currently working with the Singapore Environment Council (SEC) and CASE on increasing public awareness on the Energy Efficiency Labelling scheme for air-conditioners and refrigerators. Dr Khor has asked a question on energy labelling. With your permission, Sir, I will take it up when I speak on the energy efficient cut.

Besides collective community efforts, we want people to feel that they have a personal stake in keeping the environment clean and beautiful. To this end, we will create more opportunities for the community to enjoy and appreciate our environment and water resources. This is reflected in PUB’s new tagline “Water For All: Conserve, Value, Enjoy”, which sums up our new approach in encouraging Singaporeans to build a closer relationship with water and, in so doing, learn to appreciate and treasure this precious resource.

Sir, we have taken a cautious but proactive approach in our efforts to open up the reservoirs for more recreational activities. As a start, we have encouraged mainly organised groups, like schools, the national sports associations and clubs, to conduct their training and events in our reservoirs. Moving forward, and as these prove successful, we intend to progressively introduce more recreational activities in our reservoirs and encourage

more groups of people to participate in these activities.

Members in the House and Prof. Png may be pleased to note that there are plans to open up facilities for walk-in members of the public. For example, the PUB is working with the Singapore Canoe Federation to start a kayaking centre in MacRitchie Reservoir. The centre, expected to be launched later this month, will not only cater to school and national training but will offer rental of kayaks for members of the public, including Prof. Png and his family. As we anticipate a high level of interest from the public, there are plans to open similar centres for kayaking and sailing at other reservoirs, such as Bedok Reservoir.

Prof. Png mentioned that we should ensure that the opening up of the reservoirs benefit the general public and not only exclusive groups. I agree with him and I would like to reassure him that this has always been our intention.

Let me just explain the case of the Seletar Country Club. In the case of the Seletar Country Club, the PUB has imposed a condition that the sailing and kayaking facilities put in place and operated by the Club will be made available for organised groups of the public. Instead of individuals, we think we should open up to organised groups, because these are clubs and therefore they can organise it better that way. Hence, there is no need to join the Club to enjoy the facilities. Members should come as a group. The PUB can facilitate members to enjoy the waters in the Lower Seletar Reservoir.

Let me cite an example, Sir. In the recent Speed Crossing event, which was jointly organised by the Seletar Country Club and the Boardsailing Association of Singapore, more than 100 local and regional windsurfers, most of them in their early teens, took part in a race across the Lower Seletar Reservoir.

In fact, we have been very encouraged by the interest and positive support shown by the public for our initiative to open up the reservoirs. In a public consultation last year, about 80% of the 2,000-plus public feedback supported PUB's proposed plans to open up the Bedok and MacRitchie Reservoirs for more recreational activities. But we have to be mindful that as we open up the reservoirs, we should be concerned that the reservoirs have their own unique characteristics. So the PUB has formed the Water Network comprising members from the 3P sectors to serve as a sounding board to ensure that the activities introduced would keep to the unique character of the reservoir. So for reservoirs like MacRitchie where residents and visitors prefer the serenity and quiet surroundings, activities would be more subdued, such as fishing and canoeing, in keeping with the character of the place. In contrast, more active recreational activities like wakeboarding and dragon boating would be introduced in the more urban reservoirs such as Bedok.

Besides the reservoirs, we are also looking at opening up the Pulau Semakau landfill, which SPS Mr Yatiman Yusof has described so vividly. Many people picture a landfill as a dirty and smelly place. This is not the case with the Semakau landfill. In fact, if Members are interested, we could organise for them a trip to the landfill one day. Semakau landfill today has a pleasant environment as a result of environmental and conservation measures taken by the NEA. For example, the mangroves on Pulau Semakau were conserved while new mangroves were planted to replace those affected by the construction of the landfill. Biodiversity surveys conducted on the island also revealed a rich variety of flora and fauna. These include a species of seagrass found nowhere else in Singapore and rare birds such as the Great-billed Heron.

Budget FY 2005 – Committee of Supply – Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources

Sir, let me address the specific concern by Dr Khor on newspaper vendors. When the street hawkers were resited to hawker centres in the 1980s, some street hawkers whose trades were not compatible with those in the hawker centres were allowed to operate in the streets. In 1994, street hawkers were licensed in a one-time exercise to control their numbers and no more licences were issued after that. The intention was to phase out these street hawkers through natural attrition and allow such trades to move into proper premises. In 2000, the trade hawking scheme was reopened to allow itinerant ice-cream vendors to operate in the town council estates and parks. In August 2004, the scheme was extended to allow non-easily perishable food, like sealed packed food, nuts, and others, to help those in financial difficulties.

Dr Khor has suggested that NEA consider allowing new newspaper vendors under the Street Hawking Scheme. While allowing more newspaper vendors will not pose a public health problem, there are other considerations, such as inconvenience to the public, for example, obstruction to pedestrians or even vehicular traffic on crowded pavements and roads, as well as unfair competition to the shopkeepers that we have to bear in mind. But we will review the scheme and consult the relevant agencies, including our town councils.

Sir, in conclusion, Singapore will continue to face its own unique challenges in balancing both our economic and social progress while achieving environmental sustainability. However, we are determined to ensure that all who live in Singapore continue to enjoy a quality environment conducive for work and play, by working in partnership with the joint owners of the environment, mainly the local communities and the businesses who operate here. Together, we can

achieve a sustainable Singapore for our children and children's children.

Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang: Sir, I thank the Minister for his good news. I am so excited that I am almost rushing to get my T-shirt, pants and sunglasses to launch into the kayak. Certainly, I applaud the Ministry's efforts in reducing our solid waste. Here, I have a suggestion which is to address a particular problem in Singapore, maybe peculiar to Singapore and I think Hong Kong as well. When my wife and I first bought our condominium, it was a new condominium, we were like many other home owners in Singapore interested in customising the unit. So I told the condominium developer, "Don't put in the floor because I am going to put in a new floor." The condominium developer said, "No. We will put in the floor. You come in, you take out the floor and throw it away and then put in your new floor."

Sir, this is a problem that perhaps his Ministry and the Ministry of National Development — I am very glad to see the Second Minister for National Development sitting right there — get together and arrange with the developers to say, "Give your buyers an option. If they don't want certain fittings, let them have an option not to have the fittings." In fact, we did not even ask them for a discount. We just said that to save on the environmental resources and to reduce construction waste, give the buyers the option not to have the fittings, give them a menu and say, "Tick off what things you want", and install them; those things they do not want, do not install. I think this is a win-win situation. I do hope the two Ministries can get together to do this. If he can do this — construction waste is a very large part of our solid waste — I am sure he will be that much closer to meeting his goal before time.

Assoc. Prof. Dr Yaacob Ibrahim: Sir, I thank **Prof. Png** for his creative

[Assoc. Prof. Dr Yaacob Ibrahim]

suggestion. I agree with him that we should find ways and means to help. In fact, our construction waste, ie, recycling waste, is one of the highest. But I agree with him that there is scope for us to do more. I will pass the suggestion to the Ministry of National Development, and we can work together on this.

Ms Indranee Rajah (Tanjong Pagar): I want to seek clarification on the newspaper vendors. As the Minister may recall, during the Presidential debate, I had raised this issue. And in that particular case, my resident was asking to take over an existing licence. So the explanation that it might inconvenience people does not really apply in that case because it is an existing licence. It is just that he was not allowed to take over. What that really suggests is that there is a policy reason behind it. I would urge the Ministry to consider issuing more licences.

Assoc. Prof. Dr Yaacob Ibrahim: Sir, as we mentioned in the reply, we want to try and move some of the street hawkers of the streets into customised places where they can sell newspapers. But, at the same time, those who are holding newspaper licences are allowed to renew it on a year-to-year basis. In the specific case she mentioned, the licensee has asked for the licence to be transferred to another person. These are instances in which we have to look at it very carefully as to whether or not we want to allow the industry to grow or to keep it to a certain size. But I would look into the specific request and see whether a special case can be made. But having said that, we must bear in mind that we do not want it to grow unwittingly because we want to make sure that the newspapers which are being sold in the shops and supermarkets are not, in a sense, threatened by the street vendors.

Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan: Sir, just a point of clarification on the newspaper vendors again. The cases I am referring to are all transferred. Actually, they are not supposed to be transferred. But many of the original licensees are not operating the stalls anymore because they are either getting on in age or they do not want to operate since they were given in 1994. So many of the operators are actually not supposed to be operating them. Occasionally, when they were caught, they would come and appeal to us. The licence cannot be transferred. On the other hand, there are no new licences issued, and they have been making a living out of these stalls for a while. So these are really the cases. The other issue is that we can work with the town councils to identify areas or potential locations, where these vendors could be located and that may not pose any competition, as some are selling along the streets, and every evening, you will see a long queue of people buying the *Wanbao*.

Assoc. Prof. Dr Yaacob Ibrahim: Sir, on Dr Khor's second suggestion, we can look into that to see how we can work together with the local agency. On the first point, we have to bear in mind that certainly, in some cases, these are licences held by the parents, whose children would have grown up and chances are that they probably would not be interested. Dr Khor and I are familiar that some of these transfers came into effect without us knowing it, and therefore we have to clamp down. I understand the concerns of Dr Khor and Ms Indranee Rajah, and I promise both Members that we will take a look at this much closely.

The Chairman: Order. I propose to take the break now.

Thereupon Mr Speaker left the Chair of the Committee and took the Chair of the House.