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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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*Monday, 18th July, 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 Cedric Foo Chee Keng (West Coast).

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).

This is a job for all Singaporeans.

**Mr Steve Chia Kiah Hong:** Sir, if I may ask the Deputy Prime Minister, with our tight border control and security checks at the border, how do we expect that the smugglers or terrorists can actually manage to smuggle the bombs into Singapore when security is so tight?

**Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam:** Sir, I would say that just the fact that we have had no bombs in Singapore shows that our border controls work.

**Mr Alexander Chan Meng Wah (Nominated Member):** Sir, one of the successes of the British investigation after the fact was that they had a network of thousands of closed circuit televisions and there was one statistic which said that the chance of a Londoner being caught on camera is like 300 times a day. My question is whether or not we think that this might be necessary for us to implement in Singapore.

**Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam:** Sir, we are extending the CCTV coverage in our bus stations, MRT stations and other places in Singapore where people congregate. It is a part of life now. For example, at our MRT stations, all our CCTV cameras are those where the films are recorded and we can analyse them. Surveillance is one of the effective ways of deterring terrorism. We have to expand this to areas where many Singaporeans go to in order to travel or to get together for meals and recreation. We cannot, of course, have a system where the whole of Singapore is under surveillance. So, one has to have a judicious balance between the needs for security and respecting the privacy of Singaporeans. That is a difficult decision which all societies in the world have to make today.

**Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang (Nominated Member):** Sir, I would like to take up a point made by another Member on the connection between the war on terrorism and Iraq. I note that our engagement in Iraq was singled out in the joint statement between President Bush and our Prime Minister Lee in the Prime Minister's recent visit to Washington. But, Sir, even some years after the coalition intervention in Iraq, there has been no evidence of weapons of mass destruction. So, I would like to ask the Deputy Prime Minister for his views on whether the coalition intervention in Iraq has actually advanced or brought us backwards in the war against terrorism.

**Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam:** Sir, I am not going to enter into a debate about whether the war in Iraq is justified or not. That is another issue. But I would say, Sir, that with all the measures which have been taken over the last three years since 9/11, including the war in Afghanistan, the war in Iraq, the arrest of the Al Qaeda leaders, the detention of the JI leaders here, breaking up of cells, on the whole, the world is a safer place today than in 2001, and it is because of the fact that the world is now alert to this threat of terrorism and it is a world-wide fight across many sectors, dimensions and areas. It is not a fight where you can isolate it in one territory. It is not a fight which is external. It is a fight which is everywhere, including in our midst, and that is why

eradicating terrorism is going to take a long time, possibly two or three generations, and we must be prepared for this long struggle. That is life.

**Dr Geh Min:** Mr Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister has pointed out that we should not deteriorate into paranoia. I fully agree with him. He has also emphasised the importance of prevention, particularly integration of society. I would like to make a point here that I think that we could do better with integration between the different races in schools. I know that a lot of effort is put into this, but I get the impression that, because of the mother tongue policy, a lot of school children today are perhaps not as well integrated with other races as they could be. For instance, my daughter went to school where there were hardly any Malay or Indian children because it did not offer those mother tongue languages. So, can I say that we should look more into integration at the school level because I feel that, as has been seen, a lot of these terrorists are actually very young, and I am sure the seed of this would be planted at the educational level?

**Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam:** Sir, the Minister for Education is in this House and I am sure that he has listened to the point which Dr Geh Min has said so eloquently. If the Minister would like to reply, he can do so. Or, if Dr Geh Min could file a Question for Oral Answer, I am sure the Minister would give her a comprehensive reply.

**Mr Inderjit Singh:** But, Sir, I think this is an important area that should be under the purview of the Coordinating Minister for Security and Defence. If we look at the Pakistani boys who were born and bred in London and they could not perhaps integrate and could then be cultivated for such terrorist acts, my fear is, not today but down the road, if our children are not cultivated to integrate with one another. And it is a real problem, particularly when we talk to the minorities. I was just discussing with Mdm Cynthia Phua that my daughter was asked to form a study group in her school in Cedar Secondary. All her group members were Indians, and I worry about this because I thought that she should have had a mixed group. And this is not an isolated story. There are many incidents like this. I hope that Members will bring up their experiences. Perhaps it is not just a matter for the Ministry of Education, but it is a security issue.

**Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam:** Sir, I will just make one general point, and that is in a multi-racial society like Singapore, we must use every means possible in order to foster more integration among our races, particularly among our young people and, wherever it is possible to do so, we should encourage such activities so that communities would have a better understanding of each other. That is why, while we understand that each religious group and each community will have some activities which they would prefer to do on their own in public places, in schools, for example, we should foster integration as much as possible, and I agree with Mr Inderjit Singh on that point. But, as to whether if we do all these, if other societies do all these, if we look into the problems of poverty, this will remove the terrorist threat, that is still to be debated, because the analysis so far is that it goes beyond social problems. It has an illogical, perverse religious inspiration, and no amount of attention to social problems can remove that, although attention to

The OPC scheme was designed to provide car owners with the option to own cars at significantly lower costs if they are prepared to use them sparingly. Under the scheme, OPC owners are given substantial upfront tax rebates and road tax discounts. In return, the use of OPCs is restricted to certain time periods. Since its introduction in September 1994, the total OPC population has been increasing steadily, from about 450 at the end of 1995 to about 8,300 today. OPCs currently make up about 1.9% of the total car population [or 1.1% of the total vehicle population].

The sale of day licences suggests that OPC owners are using their cars less frequently during the restricted periods. The number of day licences sold has been decreasing, from about 30 day licences per vehicle per year in 2000 to about 13 last year.

The increasing take-up of OPCs, coupled with the decrease in sale of day licences, shows that the scheme is popular and has met its intended objective of providing individuals the option of owning cars at a lower cost in exchange for lower usage. It continues to be relevant today, even with the expansion of ERP, because the coverage of ERP is still not island-wide yet.

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\*The figure covers both Weekend cars and OPCs, which use the same day licence.

## WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

### PERSONS IMPRISONED OR DETAINED

(Annual statistics)

1. Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang asked the Minister for Home Affairs if he will publish annual statistics on the number of persons imprisoned or detained, by type of institution, type of detention, gender, age group and nationality.

Mr Wong Kan Seng:

The Singapore Prisons Department has been publishing statistics relating to offenders in its Prisons Annual Reports. In fact, some of the statistics which Prof Ivan Png has

**highlighted, such as a breakdown of offenders by detention and gender can be found in the Annual Reports. These reports, which contain statistics on our penal institutions' and Drug Rehabilitation Centres' average daily population, admissions as well as population breakdown by gender, are widely distributed to the Department's strategic partners and official visitors. They are also available in the Parliament library and the libraries of our tertiary institutions. I have asked Prisons Department to make them more accessible to the public.**

**Details of offenders by age and nationality are currently not disclosed annually as a matter of course. However, Prisons Department has released these statistics on a request basis. I have also asked Prisons Department to consider making more information available in its Annual Report.**

**As for the breakdown of offenders by institutions, for security reasons, it is better for such statistics not to be disclosed.**

## **ENDANGERED SPECIES (IMPORT AND EXPORT) ACT**

### **(Amendment)**

**2. Dr Geh Min asked the Minister for National Development whether he will consider amending the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act to serve as a more effective deterrent against illegal wildlife trade by (i) increasing the current fine of \$5,000 to a more realistic figure; (ii) amending the Act to a per animal basis, or in the case of animal parts, a quantifiable unit, to replace the present 'per species' penalty that does not represent the true market value of what is traded; and (iii) authorising the detention of specimens that are in transit.**

**Mr Mah Bow Tan:**

**The Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act was passed in March 1989 to give effect to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, or CITES in short. Since then, we have amended the Act twice to align it with additional CITES requirements. In view of the various revisions to CITES recently, we have started another round of review of the Act. As part of the review, we would consider updating the provisions in the Act on penalties, to maintain effective deterrence.**