

**Volume 80
No. 11**



**Monday
19th September, 2005**

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES SINGAPORE

OFFICIAL REPORT

TENTH PARLIAMENT

PART II OF SECOND SESSION

VOLUME 80

Monday, 19th September, 2005

The House met at 1.30 pm

PRESENT:

- Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Chew Heng Ching (East Coast)).
- Dr Ahmad Mohd Magad (Pasir Ris-Punggol).
- 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).
- Dr John Chen Seow Phun (Hong Kah).
- Mr Steve Chia Kiah Hong (Non-Constituency Member).
- Assoc. Prof. Chin Tet Yung (Sembawang).
- Mr Charles Chong (Pasir Ris-Punggol).
- 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.
- Ms Indranee Rajah (Tanjong Pagar).
- Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan (Hong Kah).
- Assoc. Prof. Koo Tsai Kee (Tanjong Pagar), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence and Minister for the Environment and Water Resources.
- Dr Lee Boon Yang (Jalan Besar), Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts and Government Whip.
- Mr Lee Hsien Loong (Ang Mo Kio), Prime Minister and Minister for Finance.
- Mr Lee Yock Suan (East Coast).
- Mr Leong Horn Kee (Bishan-Toa Payoh).
- Mr Lawrence Leow Chin Hin (Nominated Member).
- Mr Lim Boon Heng (Jurong), Minister, Prime Minister's Office.
- Dr Michael Lim Chun Leng (Pasir Ris-Punggol).

Mr Lim Hng Kiang (West Coast), Minister for Trade and Industry.

Mr Lim Swee Say (Holland-Bukit Panjang), Minister, Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for National Development and Deputy Government Whip.

Mr David T E Lim (Holland-Bukit Panjang).

Mr Loh Meng See (Jalan Besar).

Dr Loo Choon Yong (Nominated Member).

Miss Penny Low (Pasir Ris-Punggol).

Assoc. Prof. Low Seow Chay (Chua Chu Kang).

Mr Mah Bow Tan (Tampines), Minister for National Development and Deputy Leader of the House.

Encik Mohamad Maidin B P M (Marine Parade), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Home Affairs.

Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman (Sembawang), Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports.

Dr Lily Neo (Jalan Besar).

Ms Irene Ng Phek Hoong (Tampines).

Mr Ong Ah Heng (Nee Soon Central).

Dr Ong Chit Chung (Jurong).

Dr Ong Seh Hong (Aljunied).

Assoc. Prof. Ong Soh Khim (Nominated Member).

Mr Othman Haron Eusofe (Marine Parade).

Mdm Cynthia Phua (Aljunied).

Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang (Nominated Member).

Mr S Iswaran (West Coast), Deputy Speaker.

Mr Seng Han Thong (Ang Mo Kio).

Mr K Shanmugam (Sembawang).

Mr Sin Boon Ann (Tampines).

Dr Tan Boon Wan (Ang Mo Kio).

Dr Tan Cheng Bock (Ayer Rajah).

Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam (Sembawang).

Mr Tan Soo Khoon (East Coast).

Dr Tan Sze Wee (Nominated Member).

Mr Teo Chee Hean (Pasir Ris-Punggol), Minister for Defence.

Dr Teo Ho Pin (Holland-Bukit Panjang).

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam (Jurong), Minister for Education.

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan (Holland-Bukit Panjang), Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports and Second Minister for Trade and Industry.

Mr Wee Siew Kim (Ang Mo Kio).

Mr Wong Kan Seng (Bishan-Toa Payoh), Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Home Affairs and Leader of the House.

Assoc. Prof. Dr Yaacob Ibrahim (Jalan Besar), Minister for the Environment and Water Resources and Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs.

Encik Yatiman Yusof (Tampines), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts.

Mr Yeo Cheow Tong (Hong Kah), Minister for Transport.

Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon (Jurong), Minister of State, Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports.

Mr Zainul Abidin Rasheed (Aljunied), Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

ABSENT:

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

Mr Ahmad Khalis Bin Abdul Ghani (Hong Kah).

Mr Ang Mong Seng (Hong Kah).

Permission to Members to be Absent

Mr Chiam See Tong (Potong Pasir).

Dr Chong Weng Chiew (Tanjong Pagar).

Mr Heng Chee How (Jalan Besar), Minister of State, Ministry of Trade and Industry and Ministry of National Development.

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.

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

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

Mr Lee Kuan Yew (Tanjong Pagar), Minister Mentor, Prime Minister's Office.

Dr Warren Lee (Sembawang).

Mrs Lim Hwee Hua (Marine Parade), Minister of State, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Transport.

Mr Raymond Lim Siang Keat (East Coast), Minister, Prime Minister's Office, Second Minister for Finance and Second Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Mr Low Thia Khiang (Hougang).

Mr Matthias Yao Chih (MacPherson).

Dr Ng Eng Hen (Bishan-Toa Payoh), Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Defence.

Ms Eunice Elizabeth Olsen (Nominated Member).

Mr Ong Kian Min (Tampines).

Mr R Ravindran (Marine Parade).

Mr Teo Yock Ngee (Nominated Member).

Dr Wang Kai Yuen (Bukit Timah).

Mr Yeo Guat Kwang (Aljunied).

Mr George Yong-Boon Yeo (Aljunied), Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Mr Zainudin Nordin (Bishan-Toa Payoh).

**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 to be or to remain absent from sittings of Parliament (or any Committee of Parliament to which they have been appointed) for the periods stated:

<i>Name</i>	<i>From</i> <i>(2005/2006)</i>	<i>To</i> <i>(2005/2006)</i>
Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam	19 Aug 12 Sep	20 Aug 15 Sep
Mr Gan Kim Yong	20 Aug 26 Aug 06 Sep	21 Aug 27 Aug 10 Sep
Dr Michael Lim Chun Leng	20 Aug 24 Sep	25 Aug 02 Oct
Mr Leong Horn Kee	25 Aug 17 Sep	29 Aug 23 Sep
Miss Penny Low	25 Aug 09 Sep	03 Sep 13 Sep
Dr Warren Lee	25 Aug 18 Sep	25 Aug 30 Sep
Mr Wee Siew Kim	25 Aug 04 Sep 03 Oct	27 Aug 09 Sep 10 Oct
Mr Zainul Abidin Rasheed	25 Aug 03 Sep 09 Sep	26 Aug 05 Sep 16 Sep
Assoc. Prof. Koo Tsai Kee	26 Aug 09 Sep 10 Sep 19 Sep	28 Aug 09 Sep 10 Sep 21 Sep
Assoc. Prof. Dr Yaacob Ibrahim	26 Aug 05 Sep 19 Sep 25 Sep	28 Aug 06 Sep 21 Sep 30 Sep

Permission to Members to be Absent

<i>Name</i>	<i>From</i> <i>(2005/2006)</i>	<i>To</i> <i>(2005/2006)</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>From</i> <i>(2005/2006)</i>	<i>To</i> <i>(2005/2006)</i>
Mr Inderjit Singh	29 Aug 18 Sep	03 Sep 24 Sep	Mr Chay Wai Chuen	07 Sep 03 Oct	09 Sep 14 Oct
Mr K Shanmugam	29 Aug 15 Sep	06 Sep 20 Sep	Dr Tan Sze Wee	07 Sep 13 Sep	09 Sep 13 Sep
Mr Sin Boon Ann	31 Aug 07 Sep	06 Sep 07 Sep	Mr Lee Kuan Yew	08 Sep	22 Sep
Ms Irene Ng Phek Hoong	01 Sep	04 Sep	Prof. S Jayakumar	08 Sep 07 Oct	25 Sep 15 Oct
Mr Chew Heng Ching	02 Sep	02 Sep	Mdm Cynthia Phua	09 Sep	11 Sep
Mr George Yong-Boon Yeo	02 Sep 05 Sep 11 Sep	03 Sep 07 Sep 26 Sep	Mr Goh Chok Tong	09 Sep	18 Sep
Mr Khaw Boon Wan	02 Sep 17 Sep	03 Sep 23 Sep	Mr Mah Bow Tan	10 Sep 28 Sep	12 Sep 01 Oct
Mr Lee Hsien Loong	02 Sep	03 Sep	Mr Yeo Cheow Tong	10 Sep	16 Sep
Mr Lim Hng Kiang	02 Sep 06 Sep 12 Sep 27 Sep	03 Sep 08 Sep 16 Sep 01 Oct	Mdm Ho Geok Choo	11 Sep 17 Sep	14 Sep 23 Sep
Dr Vivian Balakrishnan	02 Sep 14 Sep	03 Sep 19 Sep	Mr S Iswaran	11 Sep	16 Sep
Encik Yatiman Yusof	02 Sep 16 Sep 23 Sep	10 Sep 19 Sep 24 Sep	Mr Wong Kan Seng	11 Sep	13 Sep
Mr Hawazi Daipi	03 Sep 27 Nov 01 Jan	07 Sep 08 Dec 02 Feb	Mr Teo Chee Hean	12 Sep	14 Sep
Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman	03 Sep	05 Sep	Dr Ahmad Mohd Magad	15 Sep 20 Sep 24 Sep 20 Oct	16 Sep 21 Sep 25 Sep 29 Oct
Dr Ong Seh Hong	03 Sep 14 Sep 22 Sep	10 Sep 16 Sep 26 Sep	Mr Heng Chee How	16 Sep 26 Sep 18 Oct	25 Sep 28 Sep 22 Oct
Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam	03 Sep	11 Sep	Mr Yeo Guat Kwang	16 Sep	20 Sep
Mr Chan Soo Sen	04 Sep 20 Sep	10 Sep 26 Sep	Ms Eunice Elizabeth Olsen	17 Sep	23 Sep
Mr Teo Yock Ngee	04 Sep 21 Oct	08 Sep 28 Oct	Mrs Lim Hwee Hua	17 Sep	28 Sep
Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang	05 Sep 15 Oct 29 Oct	12 Sep 23 Oct 02 Nov	Mr Abdullah Tarmugi	18 Sep 25 Sep 02 Oct	23 Sep 25 Sep 07 Oct
Mr Lawrence Leow Chin Hir	05 Sep 15 Sep	13 Sep 18 Sep	Mr Ahmad Khalis Bin Abdul Ghani	18 Sep	23 Sep
Mr Zainudin Nordin	05 Sep 18 Sep	07 Sep 23 Sep	Mr Ang Mong Seng	18 Sep 27 Sep 06 Oct	23 Sep 29 Sep 11 Oct
Encik Mohamad Maidin B P M	06 Sep	07 Sep	Dr Chong Weng Chiew	18 Sep	23 Sep
			Assoc. Prof. Ho Peng Kee	18 Sep	21 Sep
			Mr Low Thia Khiang	18 Sep	23 Sep
			Mr Matthias Yao Chih	18 Sep 11 Oct	23 Sep 14 Oct
			Dr Ng Eng Hen	18 Sep	20 Sep
			Mr Ong Kian Min	18 Sep	25 Sep

Oral Answers to Questions

Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman: Sir, by and large, the selection of the national team is left to the NSAs because they know the athletes and the sports best. The national coaches identify, train and groom athletes on a regular basis and can better understand each athlete's strengths and weaknesses so that SNOC relies on the recommendations of the respective NSAs because of the domain knowledge the NSAs have.

At some point when the SNOC makes a decision, each NSA has its own appeal process that each athlete can go through to appeal for reconsideration to be recommended for selection at the SNOC.

Mr Sin Boon Ann: Sir, is the SNOC entirely satisfied that the selection and nomination by the various NSAs are carried out objectively and without prejudice or bias?

Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman: Sir, I believe, at this point in time, SNOC is satisfied that the processes have been given due consideration. I think every NSA, as I have mentioned, the Singapore Sports Council (SSC) provides a code of governance with regard to issues including the selection and recommendation of sports persons. In this particular case, I was informed that the NSA has offered the particular athlete to appeal for reconsideration and the athlete has decided not to appeal to the respective NSA.

Mr Sin Boon Ann: I am sorry to be belabouring this point. I just want to know whether or not the SNOC independently satisfies itself that the process has been transparently and objectively carried out.

Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman: Sir, as I have mentioned earlier, I believe the SNOC is satisfied that every athlete has followed through the different criteria that it has set forth. Every NSA has broad

criteria that require each athlete to go through before a recommendation is made, basically, from participation in international competition to attendance at national training sessions. So, I think SNOC looks into each NSA's recommendation and leaves it to the NSA.

On Mr Sin's query whether SNOC goes into each and every NSA's procedure and to be convinced that each NSA has gone through the due process, at this point in time, I believe they have, but I have to go back to SNOC again to request them to give us an indication whether they are satisfied that every NSA has gone through specific processes that they have put in place.

Mr Sin Boon Ann: I would be grateful if the Parliamentary Secretary can confirm that the SNOC would independently verify that the specific processes are indeed carried out.

Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman: I give Mr Sin the assurance that we will get back to the SNOC, and SNOC will then subsequently let us know that it has gone through the due process and evaluated each and every recommendation from the NSAs appropriately.

PETROL TAX**(Reduction)**

15. **Mr Steve Chia Kiah Hong** asked the Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, in view of the escalating cost of petrol, (a) is the Government collecting more revenue from the flat tax on the higher selling price of petrol; and (b) will the Government consider a small reduction in the petrol tax, so as to alleviate the rising cost of transport due to rising fuel prices.

Mr Lim Hng Kiang (for the Prime Minister and Minister for Finance): Sir, the Government does not collect more

Oral Answers to Questions

[Mr LIM HNG KIANG]

revenue when the sale price of petrol goes up. Since February 2003, petrol duty has been levied as a fixed rate per litre. In other words, petrol duty revenue depends on the volume rather than the price of petrol.

The petrol duty is a tool to discourage the excessive use of cars and to promote greater use of public transport. This objective remains valid despite the change in petrol prices. There is thus no need to review the petrol tax. We must not fall into the trap of adjusting tax rates every time there is a price change. We import all the oil that we consume. Rather than insulate ourselves from global price changes, we must learn to adjust our consumption in accordance with these price changes. This is the same with all goods and services – to let prices act as a signal of market demand and supply and to adjust our behaviour in response to these price changes. The fact that there is a tax on petrol should not make our response to price changes in petrol any different to that for other goods and services.

Mr Steve Chia Kiah Hong (Non-Constituency Member): Sir, what is the Government planning to do to help alleviate this rising cost of petrol, especially for transport companies, taxi operators and the commuters who are really affected by it?

The other question is: since crude prices have actually dropped a bit after the Katrina storm, why is it that the petrol pump prices have not dropped?

Mr Lim Hng Kiang: As I mentioned in my reply, prices serve as a very useful signal. And for us in Singapore, where we import all the oil that we consume, I think all of us, as consumers, will have to adjust our behaviour in recognition of these price changes.

As for the changes in the pump prices at the petrol kiosks, this is set by the petrol companies and it goes up and down based on demand and supply, and based on the prices that they import the refined products, not just the crude products.

Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang (Nominated Member): Sir, the Minister has explained to the House how petrol duty is being used as a way to curb usage of cars. We all know that we have limited land space and car usage is intensive of our land space. My question to the Minister is: in light of technological developments, such as the development of hybrid vehicles, which are going to be much less intensive in fuel, will this not undermine the policy intent of our petrol duty? And if so, what would be the Minister's response to this?

Mr Lim Hng Kiang: As a general policy, we encourage the use of alternative fuel and energy. This is to give us a greater diversity and also reduce our dependence on oil and petrol. As for the use of hybrid vehicles, we have to leave it to technological developments. As and when technology allows hybrid vehicles to be competitive, we will see a greater use of hybrid vehicles. For the time being, the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources has in place some schemes to encourage and weigh in favour of such conservation of energy, including the use of hybrid vehicles.

Mr Steve Chia Kiah Hong: Sir, as the Minister correctly pointed out, prices go up but, apparently, it does not seem to be coming down. Is there some kind of a cartel operation amongst the oil companies that are working in Singapore in this direction?

Mr Lim Hng Kiang: The Government does not control oil and petrol prices in Singapore. If you look at the actual increases in crude oil prices and the increases in refined products, I do not think the prices today fully reflect this

Oral Answers to Questions

increase. So I think the petrol companies have gone some way to try and ameliorate the increases that they face, especially in refined products.

Dr Geh Min (Nominated Member): Sir, I would like to seek a clarification following the Minister's reply to Prof. Ivan Png on hybrid cars. The Minister said that it is technology that is keeping up the prices of hybrid cars, as opposed to standard cars. But I think it is quite clear, for example, in the case of Prius, it is not technology that is inflating the prices. The Prius is very popular in other countries. China, I now hear, is building the largest factory for the manufacturing of Prius. It is our limited market, I understand, that is restricting dealers from bringing in these cars. I know that the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources has been trying to promote the use of hybrid cars but, frankly, it needs the help of the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Finance as well.

Can I ask the Minister how he will support the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources in pushing the use of hybrid cars, particularly, in this climate of escalating petrol prices which I do not think anyone can optimistically expect would go down in the near future?

Mr Lim Hng Kiang: If indeed all these cars are so competitive and are much cheaper, then I think consumers will react correspondingly and the demand will go up, and the dealers will import these cars.

BICYCLE THEFTS

(Statistics)

16. **Dr Ong Seh Hong** asked the Minister for Home Affairs (a) if he could provide the statistics of bicycle thefts for the past five years; (b) whether there is an increasing trend of such thefts; (c) what are the "hot spots" of such thefts;

(d) what is the plan of his Ministry to overcome such a problem; and (e) will his Ministry consider the re-introduction of mandatory registration of all bicycles.

The Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Home Affairs (Encik Mohamad Maidin B P M) (for the Minister for Home Affairs): Sir, the number of cases of bicycle theft averaged around 400 cases a year from 2000 to 2004.

In the first half of this year, 435 cases were reported. Sir, in the past, Police had sometimes grouped bicycle thefts under theft and other offences. The trend came to Police's attention late last year and has since been closely monitored. This may account for the higher number of cases reported for the first half of this year. Police has noted the recent increase in bicycle theft cases, and is working with various groups to deal with the problem in a comprehensive manner.

There are, however, no particular geographical locations or 'hot spots' that are more prone to bicycle theft. Bicycle theft cases take place island-wide at areas ranging from common areas of public housing estates to streets, commercial premises, landed residential premises, outside MRT stations and at private apartments or condominiums.

In 2004, nine out of 10 bicycles stolen in public places were not secured at designated bicycle bays. Instead, the vast majority of those stolen were secured to lamp posts, railings and pipes.

Police has been working closely with grassroots organisations and the local community network to formulate Community Safety and Security Programmes (CSSP) to deter and detect bicycle theft.

One recent example was the "Lock-your-ride, Mark-your-bike – Bicycle Theft

Written Answers to Questions for Oral Answer Not Answered by 3.00 pm

Singaporeans have been and remain pragmatic. Ultimately, it is the availability of jobs and perceptions of career prospects that determine the popularity of different courses. But no one can know, with any certainty, exactly what types of skills and knowledge will be demanded in future. Our educational institutions therefore avoid making large bets on the future, or moving well ahead of the job market. Their pattern of intake of students into different disciplines reflects current economic opportunities and the demands that our industries are already able to anticipate. They also seek to ensure a good spread of talent across key disciplines.

At the school level, we provide a strong foundation of education across a broad base of subjects, to give our students greater flexibility to further their studies. At the post-secondary educational institutions, some specialisation and professional training is necessary. But the institutions are encouraging students to take options outside of their core disciplines, so as to broaden their intellectual horizons and prepare them for any eventuality in the job market.

The fact that more students are opting for the life sciences is entirely expected, and will support the continued growth of the biomedical industries. But these are not the only growth opportunities for Singapore, or the only rewarding careers for young Singaporeans. We will promote awareness amongst our students of all the opportunities available, and seek to retain interest in engineering and the physical sciences as we go forward. We will seek to ensure that adequate talent is available to support a broad and flexible strategy of industrial growth – including our key industrial clusters, namely, Electronics, Chemicals and the Biomedical Sciences, and new growth industries such as Environmental and Water Technologies, and Interactive and Digital Media.

The polytechnics, for example, are actively engaged in promoting interest in engineering amongst secondary school students, through a joint Task Force in partnership with the Singapore Science Centre, EDB and other organisations. IDA and the Singapore Computer Society organise seminars and exhibitions to promote the IT industry to secondary and JC students. NUS and NTU also conduct outreach activities, including promotional talks at schools and JCs, to interest students in taking up engineering and the physical sciences. A*STAR is also focused on developing a pipeline of research talent in both the biomedical sciences as well as the engineering and physical sciences. Last year, 50% of A*STAR scholarships were awarded to students in the engineering and physical sciences.

UNSOLICITED TELEMARKETING CALLS

(Protection of consumers)

18. Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang asked the Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts if he will consider protecting Singapore consumers from unsolicited telemarketing calls, especially to their mobile numbers when they are roaming overseas, through either regulation, appropriate technology or both.

Written Answers to Questions for Oral Answer Not Answered by 3.00 pm

Dr Lee Boon Yang:

Prof Png asked about protecting Singapore consumer from unsolicited telemarketing calls. In a free market economy, we must expect businesses to become more creative in their efforts to win customers. MICA recognises that telemarketing is a common and bona fide marketing tool used by companies in many countries, but also acknowledges that irresponsible telemarketers are a nuisance to consumers.

Telemarketing involves one-to-one voice communication, which falls in the realm of private communication. As such, it is difficult to regulate this form of communication. Indeed, it may cause alarm among the public, if the Government were to monitor such private communication. For this reason, MDA and IDA do not regulate the content and mode of personal communications over the telephone. A balance must therefore be sought between curbing irresponsible telemarketing and the Government's intrusion into the area of free communication and privacy. Instead of direct intervention, there are a number of other safeguards to protect the consumers.

Under the Telecom Competition Code, IDA prohibits telecom licensees from providing their subscribers' information to any third party for marketing any goods and services. However, telemarketers may not be telecom licensees, and may have solicited, through legal channels, the users' telephone numbers, which means they may not be covered by the Telecom Competition Code.

Hence, industry-led initiatives are important means to address consumers' concerns. For example, the Mobile Marketing Council of Singapore (MMCS) was founded in January 2003, under the auspices of the Direct Marketing Association of Singapore (DMAS). It includes representatives from various segments of the mobile marketing industry, such as advertisers, mobile operators, mobile services providers, and mobile technologies providers. Its goals include sharing best practices and advising on legal compliance. In 2004, in response to growing concerns by mobile subscribers, it set out to draw up a position paper on mobile subscribers' privacy. MMCS is currently working with DMAS on a set of guidelines for responsible mobile and e-mail marketing.

Just last month on 25th August 2005, the Contact Centre Association of Singapore (CCAS) partnered with the Association of Banks in Singapore (ABS) and the Insurance and Financial Practitioners Association of Singapore (IFPAS) to release a set of telemarketing guidelines for the finance industry. These guidelines establish a common understanding of acceptable conduct when telemarketing financial products.

MICA welcomes further initiatives by industry associations to promote best practices in telemarketing and other forms of direct marketing.

Lastly, there are simple measures that each one of us can adopt to prevent or reduce unsolicited calls to the mobile numbers. For example, consumers can use the caller-ID function to screen local calls. Consumers can also buy mobile phones with a built-in function to reject or alert any calls from unknown numbers. These mobile phones are commonly available from several manufacturers. However this may not work when a subscriber is roaming overseas, as the call is re-routed and the availability of caller-ID is dependent on the commercially negotiated terms between the operators in the two countries.

Written Answers to Questions for Oral Answer Not Answered by 3.00 pm

To sum up, in an increasingly connected world, telemarketers must adopt ethical practices. We will continue to engage the DMAS and MMCS to promote responsible mobile marketing through industry guidelines and best practices. Meanwhile consumers should also exercise care when disclosing their contact information so as to prevent or reduce unsolicited calls from telemarketers.

HDB FLAT OWNERS

(Bank origination loans)

20. **Dr Ong Seh Hong** asked the Minister for National Development since the introduction of bank origination loans (a) what is the total number of HDB flat owners taking up such loans; (b) how many of them are first time, second time and more than second time HDB flat owners respectively; (c) how many of them are those who switch from HDB origination loans to bank loans on their existing flats; (d) whether the Ministry or HDB makes it mandatory for all banks to fully explain the consequences of switching to, or taking up, bank origination loans; (e) how many flats on bank origination loans have been repossessed or are in the process of being repossessed by the banks; and (f) whether the Ministry or HDB has any guidelines on when and under what circumstances the banks can repossess HDB flats.

Mr Mah Bow Tan:

Bank origination of HDB market rate loans has provided HDB flat buyers with attractive and flexible home loan packages offered by the various banks. Since 1st January 2003, flat buyers who are not eligible for an HDB concessionary loan have had to take up loans from banks/financial institutions instead. These include Singapore Permanent Resident households, households with monthly income of more than \$8,000 and those who own private properties.

As at 31st August 2005, 64,000 HDB flat owners have taken up loans from banks/financial institutions. 40% were buying HDB flats for the first time, while 34% were second-time HDB flat owners. They included 10,200 households who had refinanced their existing HDB loans with banks. A significant number of these households were Singapore Permanent Resident households, private property owners and high-income earners.

Those who borrow from the banks to buy HDB flats are subject to the terms and conditions imposed by the banks. This was emphasised when the bank origination policy was announced in January 2003. HDB constantly reminds buyers, through various publicity channels and the media, to buy a flat that is within their means and not to overstretch themselves financially. All flat buyers must exercise financial prudence in their home purchase. If they default on the loan repayment, whether it is for an HDB or bank loan, and they are unable to make alternative repayment arrangements, their flats may be repossessed.

Banks may repossess HDB flats according to the mortgage terms agreed to with the mortgagor, as well as the procedures set out in the Housing and Development (Mortgage to Lender) Rules 2002. So far, 61 mortgagee sale of flats by banks have been completed or are pending completion. They represent about 0.1% of the total number of bank loans taken by HDB flat buyers.

Written Answers to Questions for Oral Answer Not Answered by 3.00 pm

Based on our experience, HDB residents are generally cooperative and comply with the authorities' requests to remove items within their flats that are potential fire hazards and those which obstruct the common corridors. However, if there are recalcitrant residents who refuse to remove the items as requested, HDB can, as a last resort, compulsorily acquire the flat or terminate the tenancy in the case of rental flat. Town Councils can also fine them up to \$1,000 for not removing items placed at the common areas despite being asked to do so.

STUDY MOTHERS ("PEIDU MAMA")

29. Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang asked the Minister for Home Affairs if he will review the *peidu mama* situation and, in particular, (i) provide the number of mothers from China who accompany their children to study in primary and secondary schools here; (ii) provide the number of such mothers working on work permits; and (iii) review the procedures for approving student visas to ensure that the child has sufficient funds for the entire course of study without an accompanying mother seeking employment here.

Mr Wong Kan Seng:

"Peidu mama", or study mothers, refer to the group of mothers who are here in Singapore to accompany their children studying here. As at end July 2005, there were about 6,800 study mothers in Singapore, of whom some two-thirds were from the PRC.

The Ministry of Manpower does not allow study mothers to work during their first year of stay here. This is to enable them to properly supervise their children who are studying in a new environment. Thereafter, they can apply for a Work Permit to work. As at end June 2005, less than 1,000 study mothers were holding Work Permits.

Before the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority approves an application for a Student's Pass, it would make sure that the foreign student has been accepted by an approved educational institution. ICA requires a student studying in our Government schools, private education organisations and ITEs to have a local sponsor, who will be responsible for the student. ICA may also require the student to furnish a security deposit. ICA would not approve the application if it has reason to believe that the applicant is not bona-fide.

These safeguards have been found to be adequate in mitigating any immigration or law and order risk that these students and their mothers may pose. Out of more than 6,000 study mothers in Singapore, less than 40 study mothers were caught for illegal activities for the period from January to July 2005.

As such, we see no need at present to review the current procedures for approving student visas. However, let me assure the House that if and when the Home Team detects study mothers abusing their stay here, actions will be taken against them.

Written Answers to Questions

The conditions include the following:

(i) proceeds of the lottery, after deducting expenses incurred, are to be used for the purpose for which the organisation has been established (expenses should not exceed 30% of the proceeds);

(ii) the organisation conducting the lucky draw is not to promote more than one lottery a year;

(iii) if the total value of prizes exceeds \$10,000, the results of the lottery are to be published in a newspaper within seven days following the determination of all the winners;

(iv) all prizes which are not won or remain unclaimed after two months of the announcement of the winners are to be donated to the Community Chest or to such other charity as may be approved by the Minister; and

(v) an audited statement of accounts and the results of the lottery are to be sent to the Police within three months of the termination of the lottery.

In deciding whether to allow an IPC to conduct more than one lottery a year, the general guidelines include the following:

(i) the organiser must comply with the conditions under the Common Gaming Houses (Exemption) Notification and the mechanics of the promotion must not breach the CGHA;

(ii) the organisation has exercised due diligence in submitting audited statements of accounts for previous lotteries; and

(iii) a permit under the House to House and Street Collections Act has been granted.

PRIVATE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPERS**(Fittings)**

4. **Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang** asked the Minister for National Development if he will persuade private residential developers to offer buyers the option not to take delivery of fittings, without any refund of payment, and so reduce solid construction waste.

Mr Mah Bow Tan:

I believe that developers decide on the type of fittings to be used in their developments based on their understanding of target clientele's general preferences and tastes. If fittings provided are not to their customers' taste, sales of the property would be affected. Similarly, potential purchasers also choose property units based on the total product offered, including finishes and fittings.

Written Answers to Questions

Hence, there may be very few purchasers who would actually choose not to take delivery of fittings provided for in private residential developments. This is especially so if there are no cost savings or refund of payment to be derived from such an arrangement for the purchaser. The Controller of Housing has informed me that he has not received any request from purchasers or developers to dispense with the specified fittings in residential projects, and there are very few requests by developers or purchasers to provide options for fittings.

I would like to assure Prof Ivan Png that, for those few purchasers like himself who want some flexibility in the standard fittings provided, there are no rules to prohibit such variations. The Controller of Housing, who regulates housing developers, will allow the standard Sales and Purchase Agreement to be amended to cater for such variations in building finishes and fittings agreed to between the developer and purchaser. The developer and the purchaser would however have to come to a mutual agreement on this matter, the same way as they come to an agreement on other terms of the transaction such as price. The extent to which flexibility can be provided is best decided by developers, in negotiation with purchasers, and taking into account marketing, cost and other considerations. Some developers may be prepared to offer some flexibility as a marketing strategy.

There is thus no need for Government to get involved in a matter that can be decided through mutual negotiation of private parties.

HDB AND URA CARPARKS**(Cashcard parking)**

5. **Mr Steve Chia Kiah Hong** asked the Minister for National Development (a) how many Housing and Development Board and Urban Redevelopment Authority carparks have been converted to cashcard parking; (b) of these, how many are not charging entry on a per minute basis; (c) what are the reasons for these operators not charging motorists on a per minute basis; and (d) how are motorcyclists now charged, considering that they only needed to use one 65-cent coupon for the whole day regardless of area, but now they have to pay multiple 65 cents for entering different cashcard carparks.

Mr Mah Bow Tan:

Cashcard parking has been implemented in 72 HDB car parks. None of URA's car parks use the cashcard parking system.

Of the 72 HDB car parks, 50 have implemented per minute charging. The remaining 22 will implement per minute charging once their cashcard system has been upgraded with the ERP feature. This is being done progressively.

One 65-cents parking coupon allows a motorcyclist to park at a particular car park for either day or night parking, but not at different car parks. With the implementation of the cashcard parking system, motorcyclists are still charged once, ie, they pay 65 cents, for either day or night parking in a particular car park. They can make multiple trips to the same car park for day or night parking without having to pay more.

Written Answers to Questions

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY 2010 PLAN

(Consultation)

6. **Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang** asked the Minister for Trade and Industry regarding the Science and Technology 2010 Plan, (a) whether the Ministerial Committee has concluded its study; (b) whether consultation has begun; and (c) if he will open the consultation to the academic and research communities at large.

Mr Lim Hng Kiang:

The Ministerial Committee on Research and Development has concluded its study, after consulting people from the public and private sectors, overseas and local institutions, as well as other Governments and policy-makers. The Committee's recommendations were announced by then Deputy Prime Minister Tony Tan last month.

The Ministerial Committee's recommendations set the broad strategic directions for Singapore's R&D landscape for the future. MTI will take the cue from the recommendations in drawing up the Science and Technology ("S&T") Plan for 2006-2010.

An inter-agency committee was set up last year to oversee the development of the S&T 2010 Plan. As part of the planning process, A*STAR has involved many experts and leaders from the research community and industry in Singapore and abroad, as well as the key agencies and ministries.

For instance, some 450 researchers from the universities, research institutes and hospitals participated in twelve technology scan panels set up to identify new and emerging technology areas that could enhance Singapore's longer term competitiveness. The universities and clinical research community were also involved in the strategic planning exercise to identify key focus areas and new initiatives in the field of Biomedical Sciences.

The recommendations arising from the consultation process will serve as critical input to the S&T 2010 Plan. The plan will be finalised and made public in due course.

CODE OF RESPONSIBLE EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

(Complaints)

7. **Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan** asked the Minister for Manpower since the issuance of the Code of Responsible Employment Practices by the Singapore Business Federation, Singapore National Employers' Federation and National Trades Union Congress in 2002, (a) whether his Ministry has received complaints regarding discriminatory and/or unfair hiring practices and, if so, how many complaints were received; (b) if he can provide a breakdown of the types of complaints received by age, gender, marital status, disability and race; (c) if any action had been taken against any of the employers and, if so, what actions were taken; and (d) how is his Ministry working with employers and relevant organisations to discourage unfair hiring practices.