



7TH-8TH PARLIAMENT SITTING

05-06 OCT 2020



#Series

Contents

Summary.....	3
 COVID-19 impacts and policy responses (1/2)	4
 COVID-19 impacts and policy responses (2/2)	5
 Foreign domestic worker policy	6
 Lapses highlighted by Auditor-General	7
 Legal and judicial system	8
 Environmental Public Health (Amendment) Bill	9
 Adjournment Motion on second-hand smoke	10
 Medical Registration (Amendment) Bill, Civil Law (Amendment) Bill	11
 Housing and Development (Amendment) Bill (1/2).....	12
 Housing and Development (Amendment) Bill (2/2).....	13
 Arts	14

Summary

In these sittings, Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat announced extensions and expansions of previous measures aimed at responding to the COVID-19 crisis. A number of Bills were also debated, proposing changes to areas such as civil law and public health.

The session also saw MP Louis Ng speaking on his much-discussed Adjournment Motion regarding second-hand smoke.

The next sitting of Parliament will be held on 14 Oct 2020.



COVID-19 impacts and policy responses (1/2)

- **Jessica Tan Soon Neo:**
 - What can be expected on further easing of measures?
 - **Reply from Gan Kim Yong (Minister for Health):**
 - If current pilots of activities with a larger number of attendees is successful, more large-scale events will be able to proceed.

- **Louis Ng Kok Kwang:**
 - Does the government still stand by its statement that Singaporeans should embrace working from home (WFH) even after the circuit breaker?
 - **Reply from Gan Kim Yong:**
 - WFH will continue to be the default, not more than 50% who are WFH can go back to office. Employees should WFH if they can. Even after COVID-19, government will continue to encourage flexible working.

- **Chua Kheng Wee Louis (WP):**
 - Will the government review the DORSCON status to provide a better reference for the current situation?
 - **Reply from Gan Kim Yong:**
 - DORSON is not determined by the number of cases alone, and cases in other parts of the world are still rising. DORSCON Orange to remain until the global situation is under control.

- **Heng Swee Keat (Deputy Prime Minister; Minister for Finance):**
 - COVID-19 strategy: Vaccination, Testing, Tracing, Safe Management.
 - For hardest-hit sectors with uncertain roads to recovery (e.g. aviation and tourism), aim is to preserve core capabilities and enable workers to retain specialised skills. Schemes include the [Enhanced Aviation Support Package](#) and [SingapoRediscovered Vouchers](#).
 - Extend the [Enhanced Training Support Package](#) (provides enhanced course fee subsidies for firms in hardest-hit sectors) for another six months, and extend it to the Marine and Offshore sector.
 - MSF has extended the [COVID-19 Support Grant](#). Applications open until the end of the year.
 - No additional draw from past reserves for this latest support package.



COVID-19 impacts and policy responses (2/2)

▪ **Ong Ye Kung (Minister for Transport):**

- CAG will pause construction of Terminal 5 for two years, pending more clarity on air travel recovery.
- Steps to recovery in air travel:
 - Reciprocal Green-line arrangements with partner countries who should be able to conduct pre-departure and on-arrival tests.
 - Continue to facilitate transfers at Changi Airport.
 - Lift border restrictions to countries with comprehensive public health surveillance systems and comparable incidence rates to Singapore.
 - Negotiate Air Travel Bubbles.

▪ **Lawrence Wong (Minister for Education):**

- More places in local Autonomous Universities (AU) to account for Singaporean students whose overseas study plans were disrupted due to COVID-19.

▪ **Ng Eng Hen (Minister for Defence):**

- More than 6,000 MINDEF/SAF personnel were mobilised and deployed for COVID-19 related operations/task forces.

▪ **Josephine Teo (Minister for Manpower):**

- [SGUnited Mid-Career Pathways Programme](#) helps mid-career locals gain relevant work experience.
- [Jobs Growth Incentive](#) encourages employment, especially for under-40s, who receive twice the incentive.
- Although elderly persons tend to be retrenched at a higher pace, the government will continue providing work opportunities for them. Over-60 employment rate has risen from 27.2% to 38.5%.



Foreign domestic worker policy

- **Yeo Wan Ling:**
 - Why were warning letters were issued to Mrs Liew and Karl Liew who were not employers of Parti Liyani?
 - **Reply from Gan Siow Huang (Minister of State for Manpower):**
 - Will review the punishment framework and action will be taken against employers in similar illegal deployment cases, regardless of whether they were aware of the illegal deployment.
- **Louis Ng Kok Kwang:**
 - Suggested that MOM require documented consent from the FDW if they are going to be deployed outside the registered address.
 - **Reply from Gan Siow Huang:**
 - Employers already have an avenue to inform MOM if they require their FDW to be deployed outside of the stated location on the work permit. Process is under review to improve the ease of notification for employers.



Lapses highlighted by Auditor-General

- **Alex Yam:**
 - Questions regarding civil servants' training to meet the government's procurement processes, and whether there are regular refresher courses to update on new regulations.
- **Liang Eng Hwa:**
 - Are there inherent systemic IT control issues within the public service and what effective measures will be taken to address the weaknesses?
- **Reply from Indraneel Rajah (Second Minister for Finance):**
 - The Smart Nation and Digital Government Group (SNDGG) is developing systems that will automate the processes involved and minimise errors. These include automating reviews of privileged users' activities, automating the management of account and user access rights, and triggering automatic removal of unneeded user accounts and review of user access rights.
 - SNDGG has also stepped up efforts to educate public officers on the importance of strong ICT governance and security controls.



Legal and judicial system

- **Edwin Tong Chun Fai (Second Minister for Law):**
 - To proceed with two out of three proposals aimed at enhancing the [International Arbitration Act](#).
 - Save time for parties, increase the overall efficiency of the process, and continue to make Singapore an attractive place for complex international arbitration disputes.
 - Recognise that the tribunal and the High Court have the power to enforce confidentiality obligations in an arbitration.



Environmental Public Health (Amendment) Bill

- **Grace Fu Hai Yien (Minister for Sustainability and the Environment):**
 - More proactive approach towards public health threats.
 - Institute baseline environment sanitation standards for routine cleaning across high-risk premises.
 - Work with industry partners to co-develop environment sanitation standards.
 - Place greater responsibility on the managers of high-risk premises to ensure that standards are met.

- **Louis Ng Kok Kwang:**
 - Government Parliamentary Committee for Sustainability and the Environment supports this Bill and has four key proposals:
 - Implement grading system to measure the cleanliness of public toilets. Incentivise operators by linking these grades to license renewal or tax rebates.
 - Expand the scope of premises covered.
 - Train cleaners in suitable languages and formats. Ensure fair labour practices for them.
 - Proposed amendments should not result in an increased cost of living.

- **Cheryl Chan Wei Ling:**
 - Instill greater social responsibility in end-users.

- **Nadia Ahmad Samdin:**
 - Support Premise Managers in managing compliance costs.

- **Reply from Grace Fu Hai Yien:**
 - Implementation to begin with six-month advisory period.
 - Implementation will start at higher risk premises with immuno-vulnerable occupants, and will subsequently be expanded.
 - Help will be provided to Premises Managers to improve infrastructure and capabilities to enhance cleanliness.
 - Will aid acceleration of digitalisation and automation in the cleaning industry to enhance productivity.
 - Measures in place by MOM to work with tripartite partners to encourage premises to provide rest areas for outsourced workers like cleaners.



Adjournment Motion on second-hand smoke

- **Louis Ng Kok Kwang:**
 - Second-hand smoke can severely affect the health of unrelated third parties. Cigarette smoke related disputes have quadrupled during the COVID-19 period.
 - Proposes banning smoking near windows or at balconies of HDB flats and private apartments. Such legislation not novel, already implemented in certain parts of the U.S. and Canada.
 - Enforcement can utilise already-existing surveillance camera technology currently used to identify high-rise litterbugs.

- Reply from **Amy Khor (Minister of State for Sustainability and the Environment):**
 - Significant challenges in enforcing such a ban.
 - Cameras not very feasible as smokers can always hide. To capture the act, the camera must be placed in such a way that it must directly aim into the home/balcony. Finding such a suitable vantage point may be difficult, and this is also highly intrusive.
 - Concerns over privacy and infringing the owner's rights to their private space.
 - NEA and other related agencies will address this issue by working towards greater social responsibility, further enhancing inter-agency community dispute resolution mechanisms.

- Reply from **Louis Ng Kok Kwang:**
 - We need to view this as a public health crisis issue instead. Asks why cameras can't be directed at the building façade instead of into the homes, as we are only seeking to prevent smoking at the windows/balconies, and not the entire interior of the home.

- Reply from **Amy Khor:**
 - Cites other wide scale smoking prohibition laws to support her statement that the government is indeed looking at this as a health issue as well. States that camera enforcement option is impractical due to operational limitations, and cites some theoretical examples.



Medical Registration (Amendment) Bill, Civil Law (Amendment) Bill

- **Edwin Tong Chun Fai (Second Minister for Law):**
 - Doctors must act in a logical manner that is accepted by a body of their peers and must provide information that patients would reasonably require. Every question a patient asks must be addressed, and even if not, the doctor must raise concerns with the patients based on their medical records (if the doctor has access to them).

- **Pritam Singh (LO, WP):**
 - Supports both bills and praises the research that went into them. Raises questions on Section 37 of the bill (New Criteria for Doctors) and how that may affect civil cases and the blurred lines between professional misconduct and negligence.

- **Leon Perera (WP):**
 - Bill is a step in the right direction, but there should be a minimum number of medical practitioners sitting on Disciplinary Commissions.



Housing and Development (Amendment) Bill (1/2)

- **Desmond Lee (Minister for National Development):**
 - MAS will consider property loans on private housing and HDB flats as collateral on loans to Singaporean banks if they need short-term liquidity.
 - HDB will compulsorily acquire flats of owners who deliberately make misleading or false statements about any fact relating to their purchase of the flat or in transfer of flat ownership.
 - Maximum number of HDB Board members would increase from 12 to 15 to allow more room to bring in additional expertise.

- **Cheryl Chan:**
 - How long will MAS lending facilities last?
 - **Reply from Desmond Lee:**
 - Will remain throughout COVID-19 crisis period, MAS will review thereafter.
 - How cases would be handled if the spouse of the HDB owner is a LTVP holder?
 - **Reply from Desmond Lee:**
 - They will be handled the same way.

- **Louis Ng Kok Kwang:**
 - How would default rates on mortgages affect banks defaulting on loans to the MAS?
 - **Reply from Desmond Lee:**
 - Number of bad home loans remains very low (0.5%).
 - Asked about families that struggle to repay loans due to the difficult financial situation.
 - **Reply from Desmond Lee:**
 - MAS and banks would continue to help homeowners resume their mortgage payments on a regular basis.



Housing and Development (Amendment) Bill (2/2)

- **Louis Chua (WP):**
 - Have there been instances of deliberately falsified statements to the HDB and how much financial harm was caused?
 - **Reply from Desmond Lee:**
 - There were only 10 and this problem remains minimal.
- **Nadia Samdin:**
 - Does the new MAS policy increase pressure on banks to foreclose on their loans?
 - **Reply from Desmond Lee:**
 - It won't because the MAS has no control over banks' residential property loan portfolio.

Arts

▪ **Carrie Tan:**

- Arts sector is at risk of being wiped out during the COVID-19 crisis. Laments the poor wages that they earn and points out that the government has cut funding for the arts from \$937 million (2015) to \$458 million (2018).
- \$55 million [Arts and Culture Resilience Package](#) was helpful, but should be enhanced to make support accessible for all arts workers including permanent casuals.
- [Digitisation Fund](#) is also problematic because it only funds G-rated films. Parental restrictions exist to help parents control the entertainment their children consume and should not determine state funding.

▪ Reply from **Low Yen Ling (Minister of State for Culture, Community, and Youth):**

- Government funding actually increased from \$300 million to \$458 million since 2013, and the sudden increase in 2015 was because of SG50.
- Government's decision to fund only G-rated films is because it would allow for productions to be generally available rather than limited to a restricted audience due to age.