



# 9TH-10TH PARLIAMENT SITTING

**14-15 OCT 2020**



**#Series**

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## Summary

**~10 min read**

In these sittings, Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat announced planned changes to government economic support, aimed at reducing firms' dependence on welfare support. He also announced changes to government employment and income support schemes.

Members of Parliament also debated Singapore's fiscal situation, as well as the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and the arts.

The session also featured debate surrounding the Progressive Wage Model (PWM), with PAP MPs highlighting that the PWM should be seen as part of an integrated package with the Workfare Income Support (WIS) scheme.

The next sitting of Parliament will be held on 2 Nov 2020.



# COVID-19: Third Supplementary Supply and Budget Adjustments (FY2020) Bill

## Bill introduced:

[Third Supplementary Supply and Budget Adjustments \(FY2020\) Bill](#)

## Objective:

To make supplementary provisions out of the Consolidated Fund to meet additional expenditure for the financial year 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 and reduce certain appropriations for that financial year due to exigencies.

## Responses and questions from MPs:

### ▪ Ang Wei Neng:

- Urges profitable companies receiving [Job Support Scheme \(JSS\)](#) pay-outs to donate part of their pay-outs to charity.
- Government should continue the [Self-Employed Person Income Relief Scheme \(SIRS\)](#) past October 2020.



### ▪ Cheryl Chan Wei Ling:

- Need to strengthen start-ups to overcome the risks of relying on supply chains.
- Need to develop business niches in strategically important industries.



### ▪ Saktiandi Supaat:

- Government should consider allowing CPF members to temporarily tap on a small amount of CPF to resolve emergencies if needed, subject to an eligibility criterion.
- MAS and Government should monitor the debt repayment situation to ensure businesses and individuals can make loan repayments when they are due.
- Hopes for the SGD 3000 [Baby Support Grant](#) to include babies born in 2020.



## COVID-19: Third Supplementary Supply and Budget Adjustments (FY2020) Bill (cont.)

### ▪ Louis Chua Kheng Wee (WP):

- Need for accommodative fiscal policy. Government shouldn't be overzealous in boosting revenues through GST hikes.
- Government should explore possibility of issuing long term bonds as a means of funding expenditures, instead of relying on higher-cost equity funding or funding from reserves.
- Government could reallocate funds from delayed projects to help vulnerable groups in society.
- On the [Job Support Scheme \(JSS\)](#), Singapore should think of implementing automatic stabilisers instead of discretionary ad-hoc schemes.



### ▪ Yeo Wan Ling:

- Calls for setting an industry standard for informal work to be paid with cash upfront.
- Calls for contractual safety nets, specifically looking into standards for issues like payment and service waivers.
- Need to create hassle-free pathways for dispute management and mediation in non-traditional employment.



### ▪ Leong Mun Wai (NCMP, PSP):

- Government “does not inspire confidence by hastily increasing taxes and fees (MediShield Life premiums, electricity tariffs, ERP) while at the same time pledging COVID-19 measures”. Tariff increases can wait.
- Calls for a re-examination of social safety net policies.



### ▪ Hazel Poa (NCMP, PSP):

- Highlights importance of creativity and innovation amongst Singaporeans. Calls for diversity in education to foster this.





## COVID-19: Policy and responses to DPM Heng's "Emerging Stronger" speech

### ▪ Wan Rizal:

- Has there been an increased uptake of online SkillsFuture courses during the pandemic, and what outreach efforts have been undertaken to encourage Singaporeans to upskill/re-skill?



### ▪ Reply from **Gan Siow Huang (Minister of State for Manpower):**

- Courses approved to run in e-learning mode: Increase from 60 (Dec 2019) to more than 2800 (Sep 2020).
- Training places for SkillsFuture-funded courses conducted in e-learning mode: Increase from 600 (2019) to 100,000 (first half, 2020).
- Partnering with agencies such as WSG, e2i, and self-help groups to better publicise available courses and pathways.



### ▪ Gerald Giam Yean Song (WP):

- Do current measures of cordoning off entrances and exits of buildings to facilitate SafeEntry present a fire safety risk?
- Reply from **Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim (Minister of State for Home Affairs):**



- Premise owners are required to ensure that cordoned-off areas are readily accessible in cases of emergencies.
- SCDF has communicated fire safety requirements to all building owners and will continue to conduct regular enforcement checks to ensure compliance.



### ▪ Hany Soh Hui Bin:

- Should not forget about seniors who cannot cope with the technological rate of change. Suggests IMDA work with banks to set up e-banking training kiosks for seniors.
- Should better engage schools as partners and educate children on recycling and energy-saving tips.
- Community clubs, particularly new ones or those scheduled for renovation, should aim for the [BCA Green Mark 'Platinum' Certification](#).



## **COVID-19: Policy and responses to DPM Heng's "Emerging Stronger" speech (cont.)**

### ▪ **Louis Ng Kok Kwang:**

- Should legislate the right to work from home and require employers who reject the request to provide specific business-related reasons.
- Such legislation would improve gender roles and equity, as research has shown fathers would be more involved with their families and childcare responsibilities.
- Research has shown that WFH can improve optimisation and performance for businesses, improving productivity.
- Empowering mothers with the ability to WFH can improve female labour force participation rate.



### ▪ **Zaqy Mohamad (Senior Minister of State for Manpower):**

- There are plenty of opportunities across industries including software, web/multimedia development, nursing, etc. Even in tourism and retail (worst hit from COVID-19) there is still hiring going on.
- Businesses restructuring means that mismatches between jobs and skills must be expected despite workshops and skilling programmes.



### ▪ **Murali Pillai:**

- Government response has been timelier compared to other countries and is larger in scale (21% of GDP).
- Lauds the government's efforts to help ex-offenders. The employment of ex-offenders has increased substantially.





## COVID-19: Arts and culture

▪ **Darryl David:**

- Proposes that the MCCY partner with the MOE to bring arts and culture into the curriculum to ensure that students are exposed to various arts at all levels.



▪ **Edwin Tong Chun Fai (Minister for Culture, Community and Youth):**

- MCCY has rolled out dedicated support measures to assist those affected, including:
  - Waivers for tenants in SportSG facilities and venue subsidies.
  - The [Arts and Culture Resilience Package](#).
  - Government will add SGD 25 million for expanded measures and the [Sports Resilience Package](#) will help athletes by covering up to 25% of their operating expenses (capped at SGD 15,000/month) for six months from Oct 2020 to Mar 2021.





## COVID-19: DPM Heng's round-up speech

### ▪ Heng Swee Keat (Deputy Prime Minister; Minister for Finance; Coordinating Minister for Economic Policies):



- Economy:
  - The economy is showing signs of recovery and the fall in GDP will be less than the forecasted decrease in GDP, but Singapore's economic recovery also depends on how quickly other countries reopen.
  - In the future, there will be a tapering of the [Job Support Scheme \(JSS\)](#). It will be replaced with a [Jobs Growth Incentive](#) that provides more targeted care to sectors and firms, depending on their security post COVID.
- Employment:
  - Government will take up Murali Pillai's points and suggest to the MOM to extend job support schemes to ex-offenders.
  - Self-employed will continue receiving assistance till end-2020. After that, the government will explore ways of tapering this assistance.
  - The [Workfare Income Supplement \(WIS\)](#) should be viewed as part of an integrated package with the [Progressive Wage Model \(PWM\)](#).
- Industry development:
  - Industries are being assisted via [Marked Readiness Assistance Grant](#), [Enterprise Development Grant](#), and [Double Tax Deduction for Internationalisation](#).
- Education and training:
  - Companies should participate in training programmes. Government will continue to study the integration of companies into training.
- Building a Coherent Nation:
  - On average, Singaporean families have benefitted to the tune of SGD 1,500 from the [Care and Support Package](#).
  - 8,000 merchants included in, and over 300,000 Singaporeans have benefitted from, the first tranche of the [CDC Voucher Scheme](#).
- Fiscal situation:
  - The government will only borrow for infrastructure that benefits multiple generations and will maintain a disciplined use of borrowing.
  - GST collections are down 14% and the Government will set aside an SGD 6 billion [Assurance Package](#) to help Singaporeans cope with the increase.
  - GST is mostly paid for (60%) by foreigners, tourists, and the top 20% of Singaporean households.
  - If the situation worsens, DPM Heng is ready to ask the President for permission to withdraw more from the Government Reserves.



## Mental health

- **Raeesah Begum Bte Farid Khan (WP):**

- To combat mental health issues, proposes forming a mental health committee and making changes to mental health information as follows:
  - Improving quality and quantity of info about mental health.
  - Ensuring mental health affordability with review of mental health provisions.
  - Adding social and emotional learning to education curriculum and mental health campaigns.



- **Melvin Yong Yik Chye:**

- Proposes “Mental Health of Workers” and “Right to Disconnect” legislation and calls on government to study such legislation. Help employees carve out protected time for them to rest and recharge.
- Urges MOM to conduct yearly survey on workplace mental health to track workers’ wellbeing.





## Progressive Wage Model

### ▪ Koh Poh Koon:

- PWM has helped lift not just the wages of those within the PWM sectors, but those in related industries/roles as well.
- Several risks associated with mandating a blanket minimum wage:
  - Difficult to find a single minimum wage for all sectors. Too low and will not benefit workers in the sector. Too high and may lead to increased costs for consumers, increased unemployment, or businesses closing.
  - Can lead to politicisation of wage setting, where another party comes along and states higher and higher numbers to win public opinion, becoming a political auction.
  - Minimum wage typically covers all workers, including migrant workers. WP should clarify whether this is its stance.



### ▪ Zaqy Mohamad (Senior Minister of State for Manpower):

- Government isn't ideologically opposed to minimum wage, but several studies have shown dis-employment effects.
- Reply from **Jamus Jerome Lim Chee Wui (WP)**:
  - Minimum wage proposition is far lower than that of most countries, cites studies in the US and UK as examples showing minimum impact on employment.
- Reply from **Zaqy Mohamad**:
  - Wage growth of the lowest 10th percentile has increased from 1,000 to over 1,500 and other schemes such as [Workfare](#) and [Silver Support](#) also provide income support to those on low wages/with less money.



### ▪ Pritam Singh (LO, WP):

- A relatively large number (32000) earn less than SGD 1,300, important to cover them as soon as possible.
- Regarding politicisation of the minimum wage amount, can defer to experts and perhaps National Wages Council can be one forum for determining the number.
- WP's position is that the proposed minimum wage is not intended to cover migrant workers and foreign domestic workers at this point.



## Progressive Wage Model (cont.)

### ▪ **Jamus Jerome Lim Chee Wui (WP):**

- Should not rely on “folksy wisdom and beliefs” of labour union leaders as they are not rooted in factual evidence.
- The evidence, rather than belief, shows that minimum wage legislation will not seriously affect employment.



### ▪ **Leon Perera (WP):**

- How long will it take to roll out PWM to low-income workers (which could number between 36,000 and 100,000)?
- SMEs wouldn't be seriously affected, as Koh Poh Koon had mentioned, because the number of workers who would earn SGD 1,300 is very small to begin with.



### ▪ **Poh Li San:**

- How can the PWM be applied directly to manufacturing companies to assist them in attracting local workers rather than relying on workers from abroad?





## Foreign workers

- **Zaqy Mohamad (Senior Minister of State for Manpower):**
  - Government will continue to make adjustments to calibrate the flow of foreign workers, including reducing quotas on Work Passes and S Passes.





## Education and training

### ▪ Wan Rizal:

- Are there studies on the career trajectories of local madrasah graduates from previous and existing cohorts?
- Are there proportional statistics of those in the madrasah student cohorts who pursue the “secular” or non-religious academic pathways in their post-secondary/tertiary education? How many successfully graduate from our local secular tertiary institutions?
- Are there support structures for madrasah students who wish to transition from religious to secular schooling?
- What kind of jobs do madrasah graduates pursue and in which industries?



### ▪ Reply from **Masagos Zulkifli Bin Masagos Mohamad (Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs):**

- Madrasahs “play an important role” in developing future Islamic religious scholars. Students receive a comprehensive education in Islamic subjects “complemented by a strong foundation in secular subjects” to equip Muslims to practice Islam in Singapore’s “contemporary and plural society”.
- In the past 3 years, around 35% of students in each Madrasah cohort pursue pre-university Madrasah education and form a steady pipeline of religious leaders for the community. Most of these students will further tertiary education in the Islamic sciences.
- 70% of madrasah students move on to post-secondary education at Junior Colleges, Polytechnics, and ITEs after the GCE “O” Levels.



## Employment

### ▪ **Carrie Tan Huimin:**

- How long will the [SGUnited Traineeship](#) programme be available for?
- How many full-time equivalent staff does the Singapore Business Federation currently have or is projecting to hire and train in the next 6 to 12 months, so as to help jobseekers and graduates start work sooner.



### ▪ **Reply from Josephine Teo (Minister for Manpower):**

- [SGUnited Mid-Career Pathways](#) and SGUnited Traineeship programmes have helped create over 20,500 traineeship and company attachment opportunities and 2,800 local jobseekers have been placed.
- Career matching services brought closer to the heartlands, with one [SGUnited Jobs and Skills Centre](#) set up in each of the 24 HDB towns.
- Since launch of [SGUnited Jobs and Skills Package](#) in April 2020, 33,100 jobseekers placed into job, traineeship, attachment, and training opportunities.



### ▪ **Xie Yao Quan:**

- The [COVID-19 Support Grant](#) still marks a 30% income loss for three months for many Singaporeans.
- Urges the Government to “double down” on job matching and get many more job openings filled more quickly.



### ▪ **Foo Mee Har:**

- Surveys suggest companies face severe talent crunches. This makes companies look for talent abroad (especially with the rise of remote working).
- Calls for a government-led effort to introduce an Industry Skills Training Programme to collaborate with local industry and training providers, similar to the Swiss and Swedish Vocational Training Programmes.
- Calls for DPM Heng to review the [COVID-19 Support Grant](#) so that workers voluntarily leaving companies in sectors with poor prospects can receive CSG. And, the Government should make it easier to receive CSG (because it currently requires a lot of documentation to prove eligibility).





## Housing

### ▪ Gan Thiam Poh:

- Does the pricing policy of HDB BTO flats remain the same in using the average mean income of each income group as a reference and not the prevailing market price?
- What is the pricing policy for BTO flats in mature estates and is there a difference?
- Is there a plan to address the pent-up demand as a result of record sale prices crossing a million dollars in mature estates?



### ▪ Reply from **Desmond Lee (Minister for National Development)**:

- HDB flats are priced based on the price of comparable resale flats nearby, the individual attributes of the flat, and market conditions. BTO flats are priced the same way.
- The [Enhanced CPF Housing Grant](#) of up to SGD 80,000 helps first-time flat-buyers. Only 38 out of 14,400 resale transactions (0.3%) have had headline prices of over SGD 1 million.





## Population and demographic issues

### ▪ Liang Eng Hwa:

- Ageing population is expected to accelerate in the next decade. How will that impact the tax burden of the working population, and how to mitigate that tax burden going forward?



### ▪ Reply from **Indranee Rajah (Minister in the Prime Minister's Office):**

- Singapore's total fertility rate is 1.14. Not at replacement rate.
- Resilient system and measures for each generation to save for their retirement (e.g. CPF, CareShield Life, CPF Life).
- Government has set aside funds (e.g. Pioneer Generation Package and Merdeka Generation Package).
- GST as a revenue means.
- Economic transformation via raising productivity of workers and ensuring that resident labour force can support economic development.
- Welcoming foreign skilled workers to help local workers develop skills and capabilities.





## Childcare

### ▪ Gan Thiam Poh:

- What is the current number of Singaporeans provided with childcare subsidies, broken down by income group and amount of subsidy?
- Will MSF consider extending the subsidies to non-working mothers looking after other elder children in the family?
- Will MSF consider eliminating means-testing so that all parents pay a uniform fee?



### ▪ Reply from **Masagos Zulkifli Bin Masagos Mohamad (Minister for Social and Family Development):**

- Detailed breakdown of subsidy amounts and groups available in the Hansard.
- Non-working mothers can apply for the same subsidies under a special approval basis. From Aug 2020, families under the [Public Rental Scheme](#) and [ComCare](#) will automatically qualify for maximum subsidies, regardless of the mother's working status.
- Means-testing allows the Government to use fiscal resources more effectively and to extend more support to families with greater needs.



## Cybersecurity

### ▪ Gan Thiam Poh:

- How many Singaporeans have been trained in cybersecurity, and what is the plan to have adequate Singaporean cybersecurity specialists to meet arising challenges?



### ▪ Reply from **Janil Puthucheary (Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information):**

- Number of cybersecurity professionals more than doubled from 2014 to 2016, at almost 6000. 5000 Singaporeans have undergone cybersecurity training as part of the [Tech Skills Accelerator](#) programme.
- Actively working with private sector companies, CSA, and Institutes of Higher Learning to boost the development of cybersecurity expertise.



### ▪ Pritam Singh (LO, WP):

- Has it been difficult for the government to attract Singaporeans to jobs being offered by the CSA and what are the prospects going forward?



### ▪ Reply from **Janil Puthucheary (Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information):**

- There is high competition for cybersecurity roles in government agencies such as CSA, Home Team, DSTA, and GovTech. Publications and surveys coming out of both the public and private sectors support this.
- There is still a dearth of talent for these types of jobs and there is a global competition for the kind of skill sets that cybersecurity requires.



## Persons with disabilities

### ▪ Denise Phua:

- Proposes changes to ensure that persons with disabilities can more fully participate in society and not be left at the fringe:
  - Need to recognise that PWDs are equal members of society, so removing barriers to PWD participation in society becomes second nature.
  - Gaps in provisions for PWDs need to be addressed.
  - Set up partnerships so there are a full array of accessible SkillsFuture offerings.
  - Include a new definition of work.
  - Performance and progress need to be reported and readily available.

