

# Progress Singapore Party



**Progress for All**

**携手前进**

**Kemajuan Untuk Semua**

**அனைவருக்கும் முன்னேற்றம்**

**Manifesto 2025**

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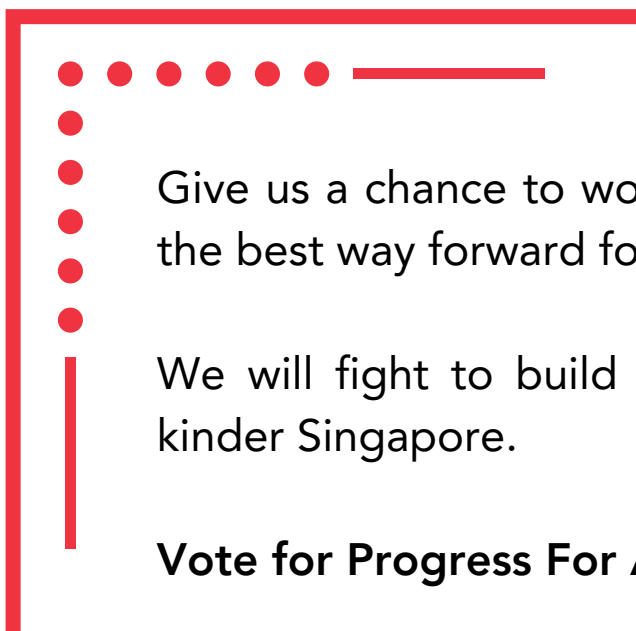
# Dear fellow Singaporeans,

Your vote is critical in this election. It will decide whether we continue to have credible and responsible elected Opposition MPs who keep the PAP in check and hold the PAP to account in a constructive way.

The PAP lost a GRC for the first time during the 2011 General Election. After that, to address Singaporeans' concerns, the PAP tried to make changes, such as launching the Pioneer Generation Package and increasing the number of BTO flats built per year. Do you think this would have been done if the PAP had not lost a GRC?

If only 20,000 voters voted differently last time, the PAP would have won all the seats in Parliament. How do you think the PAP would have governed Singapore if that happened?

Elected Progress Singapore Party MPs will always speak up fearlessly for you in Parliament.



Give us a chance to work together with you to find the best way forward for Singapore.

We will fight to build a more compassionate and kinder Singapore.

**Vote for Progress For All.**

**Vote for the Progress Singapore Party.**



**Tan Cheng Bock**  
**Chairman**  
**Progress Singapore Party**

# Dear fellow Singaporeans,

This manifesto contains over 60 policy ideas that PSP believes will help Singapore progress. Hazel and I have presented most of these ideas to Parliament before, although some are new.


These policy proposals were often hotly debated in Parliament. Thus, it is unfair for the Government to say that the Opposition has not suggested alternative solutions.

We hope that these policy debates have helped you gain a better understanding of why PSP holds the view that the current government has lost its way.

PSP believes that our ideas can help bring Singapore back on the right track and allow Singaporeans to enjoy better lives and livelihoods.

PSP envisions a Singapore where all Singaporeans, regardless of race, language, or religion, can enjoy progress together.

**Vote for Progress For All this General Election.**



**Leong Mun Wai**  
**Secretary-General**  
**Progress Singapore Party**

# Executive Summary

## What we stand for:

### **Building a fair society:**

We believe that we should build a society that better balances social and economic considerations. Public policies should not just be driven by economic concerns, but must also consider social objectives. We will make sure that the benefits of economic growth are distributed equitably among all Singaporeans and everyone gets to see improvements in their daily lives as the economy grows.

### **Living with dignity:**

We believe that anyone who works hard should be able to live with dignity. Public housing and healthcare should be affordable for all Singaporeans. The social safety net should be strengthened and made easier to navigate so that all Singaporeans can enjoy a dignified standard of living.

### **More pathways to success in education:**

We believe that our education system should provide multiple paths to success, so Singaporeans can achieve their fullest potential in the way that suits them best. Embracing diversity in education will better prepare Singaporeans for a future society that values creativity and social skills that cannot be replicated by machines.

### **Strengthening democracy and political institutions:**

We believe that Singaporeans should be able to freely discuss and debate their views to make Singapore a better place. We must build a strong system of checks and balances within our political institutions to prevent abuse of power and ensure that Singaporeans continue to play a vital part in nation building.

# COST OF LIVING

Since the last General Election in 2020, there has been a major escalation in the cost of living in Singapore. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) has increased by 18%, from 85.25 in July 2020 to 100.68 in Feb 2025. Of particular pain to consumers was the increase in the CPI for hawker food, which is beloved by Singaporeans. The CPI for hawker food increased by 20% from 84.37 in July 2020 to 101.22 in Feb 2025.

On top of an increase in the general cost of living, the GST rate was also increased from 7% to 9% with effect from 1 January 2024, compounding the pain felt by consumers when they were hit by rising prices.

Rising prices in housing and transport have further added to the burden of Singaporeans. The HDB resale price index has increased from 131.9 in Q2 2020 to 197.9 in Q4 2024, an increase of 50% over four years. The price of a Category A COE has almost tripled, going from \$33,520 in July 2020 to \$94,502 in March 2025, while the price of a 10km adult journey on public transport has increased by 20%, from \$1.48 in 2020 to \$1.77 in 2024. Even the price of water was increased by about 18% over two phases in 2024 and 2025.

On the other hand, wages have barely kept pace with the relentless increase in prices. The median gross monthly income from employment (including employer CPF contributions) of full-time employed residents increased 21% from 2020 to 2024, from \$4,534 to \$5,500. This is far lower than the increase in HDB resale flat prices or Category A COE prices, and only slightly more than the increase in hawker food and public transport prices. It is no wonder that Singaporeans are finding it difficult to keep up with the rising cost of living.

The PAP Government has often blamed global conditions and external events, such as the war in Ukraine or the post-Covid realignment of the global supply chain, for the rising cost of living in Singapore. It has also touted its many measures to support Singaporeans, such as the tightening of monetary policy, enhancements to the Assurance Package, and various other initiatives to help Singaporeans save costs.

While many countries around the world have seen a post-pandemic increase in inflation, Singapore's economic model, championed by the PAP Government, has also had a role to play in driving inflation.

One of the key drivers of inflation in Singapore is rising land costs and property prices. As rents increase, the cost of doing business increases, especially in the retail and food and beverage sectors, and this trickles down to consumers in the form of higher prices. Given that more than 80% of land in Singapore is owned by the State, the Government has tight control over the price and supply of land and real estate in Singapore. It has not, however, used this power as a tool to keep the cost of living in Singapore in check.

The PSP understands the pain that Singaporeans feel over the rising cost of living. Since 2020, we have spoken up in Parliament and proposed solutions to help Singaporeans deal with the rising cost of living in these areas: (i) GST policy, (ii) property prices and rents, (iii) food prices at hawker centres, and (iv) healthcare costs.

Our proposals are summarised in this section.

## **(1) Reduce GST to 7%**

In 2022, we opposed the increase in GST. We repeat our call to reduce GST to 7%.

GST is fundamentally a regressive tax, because the rich and poor pay the same tax in purchasing everyday products and services. Even though those with higher income spend more and pay more GST in absolute terms, those with lower income will pay more in GST as a proportion of their income. This fact remains unchanged, even if lower- and middle-income Singaporeans receive cash support and utility rebates through the permanent GST Voucher scheme.

The cash support and utility rebates from the permanent GST Voucher scheme can be funded through more progressive taxes, such as estate duty or a wealth tax. It does not need to be funded by a regressive tax such as GST.

The increase in GST from 7% to 9% when Singapore was facing high inflation and recovering from an unprecedented pandemic was, and continues to be, painful to many ordinary Singaporeans.

Singapore's fiscal position is strong. We estimate that our country has approximately \$1.2 trillion of financial reserves, which is equal to 12 times the Government's annual expenditure. In other words, even if the Government were to stop collecting revenue entirely and relied solely on reserves, our reserves will be enough to sustain the Government's operations for 12 years. In comparison, an OCBC survey in 2023 showed that more than half of Singaporeans have savings of less than 6 months' salary.

Our reserves are still growing every year. We are also generating higher and higher investment returns from the reserves each year. In fiscal year 2023, the investment returns from the reserves amounted to \$47 billion.

We are heartened that Prime Minister Lawrence Wong stated in Parliament in 2024 that there is no need for further GST increases up to 2030. He made this commitment in response to questions in Parliament by the PSP. However, we believe that Singapore's strong fiscal position puts us in a sufficiently strong position to reverse the GST hike and reduce GST to 7%.

## **(2) Exempt basic essentials from GST**

In 2022, we called on the Government to exempt basic essential goods from GST, and we repeat this call today. Such essential goods should include water, rice, eggs, cooking oil, wheat flour, and formula milk.

We propose setting price thresholds on basic essentials that are exempted from GST. For example, rice that sells for under \$2 per kg can be exempted from GST, while rice that sells for above \$2 per kg will not be exempted from GST. This will reduce the likelihood of the wealthy taking advantage of and benefiting from GST exemptions, because the wealthy are less likely to purchase the cheapest versions of essential items.

### (3) Defer land cost for HDB flats

We propose that HDB stop paying the cost of State Land used for BTO flats into the Past Reserves. Instead, the land cost will be recorded with HDB at the point a BTO flat is sold. It will be deferred and recovered from flat buyers with accrued interest, based on historical mortgage rates, if they subsequently sell the BTO flat on the resale market after the Minimum Occupation Period. The land cost recovered will then be used in a manner explained in the next section.

Currently, HDB is required to pay the cost of State Land used for BTOs into the Past Reserves. In Financial Year (FY) 2023/24, this amounted to \$7.5 billion. Because HDB prices BTO flats below market value, it makes a loss, which is paid for through Government grants from the Budget. In FY2023/24, this grant amounted to \$6.8 billion, or about 6% of total Government spending.

We do not agree with the current arrangement, as taxpayers and flat buyers are effectively made to subsidise the land cost for BTO flats, even though the land is already owned by the State.

We believe that owner-occupied public housing is a public good that should be treated as essential public infrastructure, like schools and hospitals, where land costs are not charged because it is treated as State Land. We believe that land used for owner-occupied HDB flats should be treated in the same way as schools and hospitals.

HDB flat buyers only lease their flats from the State for 99 years. At the end of the 99-year lease, the flat must be returned to the State at zero value. Singaporeans who lease their flats for owner-occupation and who never sell their flats on the resale market should not have to pay for the land cost. Only those who subsequently sell their flats on the resale market, and thus derive financial benefits, should pay land cost.

## (4) Review use of land sales proceeds in the Budget

In 2022, the PSP called on the Government to review its accounting treatment of land sales proceeds. We repeat this call again. We propose that land sales proceeds should be treated as revenue divided over the period of the lease. This means that if a piece of land is sold on a 99-year lease, the proceeds should be taken as revenue spread over 99 years.

Currently, land sales proceeds go directly into the Past Reserves and cannot be directly spent, even though the value of such proceeds is now very large. The proceeds of land sales through the Government Land Sales programme averaged \$5.5 billion annually from Financial Year (FY) 2017 to FY2021, and increased to \$8.15 billion in FY2023. The Government is only allowed to spend 50% of the investment returns from the Past Reserves in each year's Budget. This is known as the Net Investment Returns Contribution (NIRC).

Under the PSP's proposal, if a piece of industrial land was sold on a 20-year lease and the sale proceeds were treated as revenue over 20 years, the Government would be allowed to draw 5% of the sale proceeds each year for the next 20 years as revenue for use in the Budget. This is illustrated below in the form of a table.

### Revenue Stream Over Time

#### Assumptions:

- 1) Sale of industrial land on 20 year lease
- 2) Land sale remain constant for 20 years

	Land sale	Revenue in year																			
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Year 1	100	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	
Year 2	100		5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Year 3	100			5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
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...																					
Total		5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100

Before the land sales proceeds are drawn on as revenue, they should be invested as part of the Past Reserves so that they can continue to generate returns.

This proposal would provide a cumulative revenue stream that would eventually build up to a significant alternative source of revenue for the Government. It is a sensible approach that does not compromise on financial prudence, because Singapore no longer sells land on a freehold basis. It is not necessary for the Government to lock up the proceeds of land sales because State Land will not be forever gone once sold.

In February 2024, then-Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong acknowledged in Parliament that the PSP's proposal was "not an unthinkable proposition". We repeat our call for the Government to adopt the PSP's proposal on the use of land sales proceeds.

### **(5) Fair Tenancy Industry Committee to issue guidelines on annual rent increases for commercial properties**

In November 2023, the PSP proposed that the Fair Tenancy Industry Committee (FTIC), which oversees matters related to fair tenancy for retail premises in Singapore, should issue guidelines on annual rent increases for commercial properties. This would be similar to how the National Wage Council issues guidelines on wage increases.

Rent is a major cost component for businesses, especially those in the retail and F&B sectors. Excessive rent increases can impact the viability of small businesses and lead to a rise in the general cost of living. Issuing national guidelines for annual rent increases would help to set landlords' expectations, and help tenants in negotiating for more moderate rent increases. It will also ensure that rent increases align with long-term economic growth and do not undermine Singapore's social and economic development.

## **(6) Setting the rent of hawker stalls at \$500 or 3% of gross revenue, instead of setting rent at the highest bid by tender**

The PSP proposes that the model of setting hawker stall rents by tender be replaced with a new model, where all hawker stalls will be charged a monthly base rent of \$500 or 3% of gross turnover, whichever is higher.

We believe that rents are likely to be lower under our proposed model. As of 2023, the median rent for non-subsidised cooked food stalls at NEA-operated hawker centres was \$1,625 per month. Under our proposed model, hawkers will not pay more than the current median rent unless their turnover exceeds \$54,000 per month. This will reduce operating costs for hawkers and help keep food prices affordable for Singaporeans.

Additionally, lower rents for stalls in hawker centres may have a ripple effect on rents in private coffeeshops and food courts. This will be especially beneficial for residents in newer HDB towns that rely more heavily on coffeeshops and food courts for affordable food.



## **(7) Phase out Socially-conscious Enterprise Hawker Centres and centralise the management of all hawker centres in Singapore under a Government agency**

14 of Singapore's 121 hawker centres are Socially-conscious Enterprise Hawker Centres (SEHCs) managed by private operators.

In November 2024, the PSP proposed that SEHCs be phased out as the contracts of the current operators expire. The management of all hawker centres in Singapore should instead be taken over by a new Government agency, tentatively called Hawker Singapore, which will also be responsible for the promotion of hawker culture domestically and internationally.

Since SEHCs were introduced in 2012, we have seen multiple conflicts between hawkers and the private operators because of the high costs and onerous contractual conditions compared to other hawker centres managed by the National Environment Agency (NEA). As of 2023, the median rent at SEHCs is about 5% higher than the median rent at NEA-operated hawker centres. Hawkers in SEHCs must also bear the costs of offering loyalty discounts, budget meals and subscriptions to food delivery platforms. Such costs are likely to be passed on to the consumer.

Hence, we propose that SEHCs should be phased out.

## **(8) Government-funded food discounts for Pioneer Generation, Merdeka Generation and CHAS cardholders at all hawker centres and more CDC vouchers for lower-income households**

The PSP proposes that the Government provide discounts for Pioneer Generation, Merdeka Generation, and CHAS cardholders when they purchase food at all hawker centres. These discounts can be paid for through the Pioneer or Merdeka Generation Funds.

Additionally, we propose that the Government provide lower-income households with more Community Development Council (CDC) Vouchers, which can be used to pay for their hawker meals. This will reduce the cost burden of food for lower-income Singaporeans.

Since 2018, the Ministry of National Development and HDB have introduced the “budget meal” initiative. By 2026, all rental HDB coffee shops will be required to provide four to six budget meals, which are full meals that are priced affordably, as compared to the average price of meals sold at nearby eating places. Many Socially-conscious Enterprise Hawker Centres (SEHCs) have also introduced budget meals. Such budget meals are typically funded by the hawker.

We believe that the way budget meals are currently funded places an unfair burden on hawkers, many of whom are lower-income workers. Our proposals will ensure that hawkers do not bear the burden of funding budget meals for consumers, and ensure that all Singaporeans from vulnerable groups can access affordable food, regardless of where they live in Singapore.

## **(9) The Government should pay the MediShield Life and CareShield Life premiums for all Singaporeans**

Healthcare is one of the largest expenses, after housing, for Singaporeans. In 2021 and 2023, the PSP proposed that the MediShield Life and CareShield Life schemes should be nationalised, and the Government should pay the basic MediShield Life and CareShield Life premiums for all Singaporeans.

Nationalising the MediShield Life and CareShield Life schemes would guarantee all Singaporeans a minimum level of healthcare after paying the required deductible for the year. Those who wish to have more health insurance coverage can buy private Integrated Shield Plans at their own cost. There is no change from the current policy.

Although our proposal would cost an additional \$2 to \$3 billion per year, it would be game-changing. MediShield Life premiums will rise by an average of 22% per policyholder by end-2028, and are expected to increase further with rising costs and an ageing population. Our proposal will relieve Singaporeans, especially middle-class and senior citizens, of the anxiety over ever-rising health insurance premiums.

## **(10) Provide a cash gift to every mother upon the birth of a child to defray confinement costs**

Most mothers in Singapore, regardless of race, practice confinement after childbirth. This helps the mother heal physically from childbirth and adjust to life with a newborn, which can be very challenging and even lead to postpartum depression for some mothers. However, such confinement care can be expensive.

To help mothers defray the costs of confinement care, the PSP proposes a new \$3,000 HealthierMother cash gift, paid to every mother upon the birth of each Singapore Citizen child.

## (11) Lower healthcare costs by centralising drug procurement for public and private health facilities

In May 2023, the PSP called on the Government to centralise drug procurement across all public and private medical institutions and distribute drugs to public and private health facilities on a not-for-profit basis. We believe that this will maximise our bargaining power as a small nation with big pharmaceutical companies and improve our chances of reducing the overall cost of drugs.

Currently, drug procurement is only centralised for Singapore's three public healthcare clusters. Consequently, private clinics generally pay more for drugs compared to the public healthcare clusters, which can negotiate better prices with their greater bargaining power. This drives up other costs. For example, insurers must charge higher premiums to cover higher drug prices.

With rising inflation, it is important for us to contain drug costs. A nationwide centralised drug procurement system should be considered as it will help to reduce costs throughout the entire healthcare system.

These are the proposals that the PSP has pushed in Parliament since 2020. If we are voted into Parliament, we will continue to push for more measures to contain the rising cost of living.



# HOUSING

After the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, HDB was left with 31,000 unsold flats that took more than five years to sell. To prevent this from happening again, HDB replaced the Registration for Flats System with the current Build-to-Order (BTO) system in 2002.

While the BTO system has allowed HDB to build according to real demand, the experience of the last 20 years has shown that the BTO system has one main flaw. It has long waiting times because flat applicants have to get a successful queue number first, then wait out the full construction period of a flat. Flat buyers who cannot or do not wish to wait for a flat can only turn to the resale market. This has driven demand for resale flats, and is a big contributor to rising resale flat prices.

Even though the prices of BTO flats have been delinked from the prices of resale flats in an attempt to maintain housing affordability, it is impossible to suppress the prices of BTO flats indefinitely. HDB has to pay into the Past Reserves the full market value of land ("land cost") that it acquires from the Government to develop new BTO flats. Land cost accounts for almost 60% of the total cost of building HDB flats, and this will increase as resale flat prices rise.

Even though resale flat prices are rising, the Government keeps the prices of BTO flats affordable by selling them below market prices and offering buyers additional HDB grants to further lower prices. In doing so, HDB makes a loss, which must be covered by a grant from the Government. As the gap between BTO and resale flat prices widens, HDB will make bigger losses if it keeps BTO prices stable. The Government must then provide HDB with an increasingly larger grant from the Budget, which is paid for either by raising taxes or cutting spending in other areas.

We are thus trapped in this cycle: land prices rise, HDB provides more subsidies, the Government's grant to HDB becomes larger, and taxes must be increased or spending cut elsewhere to foot the bill for rising housing subsidies.

The PSP believes that this system is neither desirable nor sustainable.

Singaporeans' hopes and dreams also have changed over the years. Younger Singaporeans are getting married later, or not at all. Many desire to live independently and build their own lives, even before marriage. The long waiting times for a BTO flat are also a stumbling block for those who want to have children. Changes to our public housing policies are sorely needed to meet the changing aspirations of Singaporeans.

Another major housing concern among Singaporeans is lease decay. This is especially concerning for those living in older flats with fewer years left on the lease. The value of HDB flats may fall as the number of years left on the lease decreases, especially towards the tail-end of the lease. The flat will have zero value at the end of the lease, at which point the lessee of the HDB flat would have to find a new flat at their own cost.

For many Singaporeans, the HDB flat that they live in is their largest financial asset. The potential decrease in the value of HDB flats due to lease decay is likely to have serious implications on the financial well-being and retirement plans of many Singaporeans.

The PAP Government has proposed the Voluntary Early Redevelopment Scheme (VERS) to cope with the lease decay issue. However, it has not announced any details, except to make clear that (1) VERS is not meant to extend diminishing leases for free to 99 years, (2) the compensation terms for VERS will not be as generous as for the Selective En-bloc Redevelopment Scheme (SERS), and (3) there are no replacement flats.

In January 2023 and February 2025, the PSP called on the PAP Government to release details on VERS to provide Singaporeans with certainty on the lease decay issue. However, no details have been released. We will continue to press the PAP Government to release details on VERS as soon as possible.

We believe that our public housing policies need a fundamental rethink, rather than quick fixes and adjustments to policies. HDB must urgently return to its roots of providing affordable housing for the people, so that Singapore remains a home for all Singaporeans.

## **(1) Affordable Homes Scheme: Allow Singaporeans to buy new flats without land cost unless they sell the flats on the resale market**

The PSP proposes that we should replace the existing Build-to-Order (BTO) scheme with the Affordable Homes Scheme (AHS).

The AHS will return both HDB and CPF to their original purposes. It is designed to ensure the following:

- Singaporeans will always have access to an affordable HDB flat that they can call home for the rest of their lives without jeopardising their retirement.
- Prices of existing flats on the resale market will remain stable.

The PSP believes that owner-occupied public housing is a public good that should be treated as essential public infrastructure, like schools and hospitals, where land costs are not charged because it is treated as State Land.

Under the AHS, HDB will no longer pay the land cost used for BTOs into the Past Reserves.

Instead, HDB will sell new flats to Singaporeans for owner-occupation on a 99-year lease at a “user price”, equal to the construction cost of the flats + a premium determined by the location of the flats, so that flats in different areas will not be priced the same.

Under this system, buyers of AHS flats will not have to pay land cost.

Buyers of AHS flats will be able to live in these flats and pass them down to their descendents based on HDB inheritance rules. Because the “user price” of AHS flats will be much lower than the price of existing BTO flats, Singaporeans will be able to purchase a flat without depleting their CPF savings, which can then be used for their retirement.

The AHS will sever the link between housing prices and retirement. Singaporeans will no longer need to worry about flipping their flats or downgrading to afford their retirement. The AHS flat can be their forever home while they build up their retirement savings in their CPF accounts.

AHS flats can only be sold on the resale market if the land cost that was not charged is repaid to HDB.

The PSP believes that it is of utmost importance to moderate rising HDB prices. The AHS will allow future generations of Singaporeans to own their own homes without being burdened by large mortgages. This will in turn have positive effects on our Total Fertility Rate, retirement adequacy, the mental well-being of Singaporeans, and the overall quality of life in Singapore.

The AHS will not cause a crash in the resale market for several reasons.

First, the supply of AHS flats will be the same as the supply of BTO flats today, or about 20,000 flats per year, out of more than 1 million flats. Even after five years, AHS flats will make up less than 10% of the total HDB flat supply.

Second, AHS flat owners will have to repay the land cost that was not charged when they sell their AHS flats on the resale market. This makes it unlikely that AHS flat owners will sell their flats unless the price is high enough to earn a profit after repaying the land cost. This will support the resale flat market.

Finally, the resale flat market will be underpinned by a large pool of demand from buyers who are ineligible for BTO flats, buyers who want to live in a specific location because they want to live near their parents, Permanent Resident households, and buyers who want to upgrade to a larger flat.

The AHS will not deplete any financial assets previously accumulated in the Past Reserves. Instead, financial assets in the Past Reserves will be accumulated at a slower rate. Today, all the State Land used by HDB is converted into financial assets when HDB pays land cost into the Past Reserves. This will no longer be the case under the AHS. However, some of the land cost will be recovered when some of the AHS flats are eventually sold on the resale market

The Net Investment Returns Contribution (NIRC) will also increase at a slower rate. However, this is mitigated by the fact that the Government will no longer need to provide a large grant to HDB each year out of the Budget, as HDB will no longer need to provide as many grants to reduce flat prices for buyers or pay land cost into the Past Reserves. Thus, we believe that the fiscal impact on the Government's annual Budget will be neutral.

We believe that slowing down the rate of increase of the NIRC and the financial assets in the Past Reserves are necessary trade-offs to ensure that Singaporeans will always have access to an affordable HDB flat that they can call home for the rest of their lives without jeopardising their retirement. As a nation, we can and should do this.

## **(2) Allow singles to purchase BTO flats (up to 3-room in all estates) and resale flats at age 28**

The PSP proposes that all Singaporeans aged 28 and above be allowed to purchase 2- and 3-room BTO flats, and resale flats of all types, in all estates.

Currently, singles are only allowed to purchase resale flats and 2-room Flexi BTO flats at age 35. Our proposed change in policy will provide younger Singaporeans with more housing choices, as well as the opportunity to own their own homes and start their families earlier.

## **(3) Build more flats based on forecasted demand and reduce waiting times for new flats**

The PSP proposes that HDB build more flats ahead of demand, so that waiting times for new flats can be reduced. This is to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of flats to implement our changes.

HDB can forecast the projected demand for flats based on factors such as the marriage rate, birth rate, and the growth rate of new citizens, and adjust the level of new flat construction to meet these needs. Unused state properties, such as former schools, can also be prioritised for redevelopment into new BTO flats.

#### (4) Set up Millennial Apartments Scheme to provide greater housing flexibility for young Singaporeans

The PSP proposes to set up a Millennial Apartments Scheme, where HDB will provide affordable, high-quality rental apartments in the Central Business District (CBD) and mature estates for young couples or singles to rent on leases of 2-5 years.

The PSP recognises young Singaporeans' views that the current BTO system forces Singaporeans to decide the direction of the rest of their lives in their 20s. Not everyone is lucky enough to know what they want in their 20s. As society evolves, there is also a growing desire among younger Singaporeans to establish independent lives. The Millennial Apartments Scheme will meet these needs.

The Millennial Apartments Scheme will also relieve the pressure on couples to rush to secure a flat and provide young Singaporeans with more choices to fulfil their aspirations. It will provide medium-term housing stability for young Singaporeans while they decide on their life plans and longer-term housing needs.



# JOBS AND WAGES

The PSP believes that in order to achieve greater economic success, Singapore will always need the right foreign talents to complement our Singaporean Core and work in Singapore with Singaporeans for mutual benefit. We have never, and will never, argue for a closed Singapore.

However, our policies towards foreign workers need to be recalibrated to ensure that our economy always serves Singaporeans' interests. With an ageing population, foreign workers make up about 39% of our workforce (including Migrant Domestic Workers) as of Dec 2024. This impacts workers at all income levels. Lower-wage workers must compete with migrant workers from lower-cost countries. Professionals, Managers, Executives and Technicians (PMETs) face competition from Employment Pass (EP) holders. We must ensure that the entry of such foreign workers do not depress wages for Singaporeans or lead to other undesirable outcomes such as underemployment for Singaporeans.

Besides ensuring that there are sufficient jobs for Singaporeans, we want to ensure that these jobs are of good quality and that Singaporeans can achieve better work-life balance. Many Singaporean workers are overworked, sleep-deprived, and burnt out amid a punishing work culture. More than 90% of employees in Singapore reported working beyond official working hours, and surveys have found that Singapore has some of the longest working hours per week in the Asia-Pacific region. There is an urgent need for the Government to push forward more policies to ensure work-life balance for Singaporean workers.

In this section, PSP will lay out our proposals to recalibrate our policies towards foreign manpower and improve the work-life balance of Singaporean workers.

## **(1) Implement a Minimum Living Wage of \$2,250 per month**

The PSP proposes a Minimum Living Wage of \$2,250 per month for all resident Singaporean workers. After CPF contributions, workers will enjoy a take-home salary of \$1,800 per month.

We believe that a Minimum Living Wage of \$2,250 per month will provide workers with more clarity in making personal financial plans for themselves and their families. This figure is based on a 2019 Minimum Income Standard study on what older households need to meet their basic needs. Such a living wage benchmark will also set the standard for a fair salary in Singapore for both employers and employees.

We further believe that a Minimum Living Wage of \$2,250 per month will also enable all workers to meet their basic living needs with dignity. There are many lower-income Singaporeans who cannot make ends meet without relying on Government subsidies in many aspects of life and a patchwork of social support schemes.

A Minimum Living Wage of \$2,250 per month would mean that lower-income Singaporeans will not have to rely on various schemes such as the Workfare Income Supplement, GST Voucher, U-Save rebates, CDC Vouchers, and Progressive Wage Credits in order to survive. We believe that this is the right thing to do for Singapore and Singaporean workers.

## **(2) Strengthen the Fair Consideration Framework to provide greater job priority for Singaporeans**

Under the existing Fair Consideration Framework (FCF), employers submitting Employment Pass (EP) applications must first advertise the job on MyCareersFuture for at least 14 consecutive days to allow job seekers to view and apply for the vacancy before they can submit an EP application.

The PSP believes that this does not provide sufficient protections to ensure that Singaporean workers are given priority for job positions that are eligible for EPs.

Thus, we propose that the FCF be strengthened by (1) lengthening the job advertisement process, (2) increasing the number of advertisements required, and (3) requiring employers to show evidence that they cannot find a suitable Singaporean worker for the position even after completing the recruitment process.

This will ensure that Singaporean workers are given priority for job positions that are eligible for EPs.

### **(3) Introduce an Employment Pass (EP) quota on a per-company basis with higher quotas for SMEs**

The PSP proposes that quotas for Employment Pass (EP) holders be introduced on a per-company basis. The EP quotas should differ based on the size of the company, with smaller companies being allowed to hire a larger proportion of their workforce on EPs.

Currently, no quotas are set for EP holders. The Government believes that setting such quotas would send the wrong signal that we are not welcoming to global talent, for which there is fierce competition and worldwide shortages in areas such as technology and digital skills.

We believe that we can still be welcoming to global talent even with quotas for highly-skilled workers. It is important to introduce an EP quota to level the playing field between our small population and the huge global talent pool of skilled workers who are competing for the same well-paying skilled jobs in Singapore. Even with EP quotas, companies are still able to access a global talent pool, and hire qualified and skilled foreign workers.

Additionally, we recognise that many Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) face difficulties in accessing the skilled foreign manpower that they need. To support the growth of SMEs and enable them to hire sufficient skilled foreign manpower for their business needs, we will provide them with higher quotas for EP holders. However, these additional quotas will only apply to bona fide SMEs. They will not apply to employers of record, third-party organisations, or contractors that act as the legal employer for a company's employees.

#### **(4) Introduce an EP levy of \$1,200 per month**

The PSP proposes a new levy of \$1,200 per month on EP holders.

Such a levy will further level the playing field between Singaporean and foreign professional, manager, executive and technician (PMET) employees. It is necessary to impose a levy on EP holders because employers do not have to pay the 17% CPF contribution for foreign workers. This allows employers to hire foreign EP holders at the same basic monthly salary as a Singaporean worker but at a lower overall wage bill.

A levy on EP holders will ensure that employers do not enjoy any financial benefits from employing EP holders instead of Singaporeans.

#### **(5) Increase EP qualifying salary to \$10,000**

As of 1 January 2025, the Minimum Qualifying Salary (MQS) for EP holders starts at \$5,600 per month and reaches \$10,700 for EP holders aged 45 and above.

The PSP proposes that the MQS for all EP holders be increased to \$10,000 per month.

## **(6) Limit the concentration of work pass holders from a single nationality for every company to minimise the risk of discriminatory practices at the workplace**

The PSP proposes that the Government impose diversity quotas on a per-company basis (i.e. limits on the total percentage of a company's workforce from a single foreign nationality).

Such a policy would be a stronger safeguard than COMPASS in ensuring that our workplaces remain diverse, and do not become communal enclaves dominated by a single foreign nationality.

## **(7) Retrenched employees should not be bound by non-compete clauses**

The PSP calls on the Government to create a legal framework to exempt retrenched employees from non-compete clauses after their retrenchment.

Non-compete clauses (also known as restraint of trade clauses) are often included in employment contracts. Such clauses typically restrict an employee from working for a competitor or starting a competing business for a specified period of time, or within a certain geographical area, after leaving the company.

Such clauses can create difficulties for employees who are retrenched, through no fault of their own, when they seek to find a new job after retrenchment. It is unfair to the employee if they are forced to find a new job due to a business decision made by the company and yet are further restricted in their job options due to non-compete clauses.

## **(8) Create statutory retrenchment benefits that are legally binding**

The PSP calls on the Government to work with tripartite partners to entrench retrenchment benefits into law.

The Tripartite Advisory on Managing Excess Manpower and Responsible Retrenchment states that employees with 2 years' service or more are eligible for retrenchment benefit, while those with less than 2 years' service could be granted an ex-gratia payment. However, the Advisory is not legally binding and does not have the force of law.

The Advisory also states that the quantum of retrenchment benefit depends on the collective agreement or contract of service. In the absence of such an agreement or provision, the prevailing norm is to pay a retrenchment benefit varying between 2 weeks to one month salary, per year of service, depending on the financial position of the company and taking into consideration industry norms.

The PSP believes that employees with 2 years' service or more should be paid at least 2 weeks' salary per year of service, by law. To reduce the burden on companies, we could consider exempting smaller companies with fewer employees and companies that are entering receivership or declaring bankruptcy from these provisions.

We believe that statutory retrenchment benefits will strengthen protections for employees and ensure that retrenchments are truly intended as a cost-saving measure of last resort.

## (9) Equalise parental leave

From 1 April 2026, mothers will enjoy 16 weeks of Government-paid maternity leave, fathers will enjoy 4 weeks of Government-paid paternity leave, and both parents will share 10 weeks of Shared Parental Leave.

Parents will enjoy a total of 30 weeks of Government-paid leave to care for their infant children. A father will be entitled to a **maximum** of 14 weeks of Government-paid leave, while a mother will be entitled to a **minimum** of 16 weeks of Government-paid leave. While this is close to equal, it is not.

The PSP repeats our call for parental leave to be shared equally by default, as illustrated in the table below. This will send a clear social signal that the responsibilities of parenting are shared equally between both parents, and the Government will equally support both parents in having and raising children. Under our proposal, both parents will now have 15 weeks of parental leave, unless they agree otherwise.

Leave type	Current	PSP Proposal
Government-paid maternity leave	16 weeks	4 weeks
Government-paid paternity leave	4 weeks	4 weeks
Shared Parental Leave (shared equally between both parents by default)	10 weeks (5 weeks per parent by default)	22 weeks (11 weeks per parent by default)
<b>Total</b>	<b>30 weeks</b>	<b>30 weeks</b>

## **(10) Provide greater incentives for family-friendly employers**

Employers may face difficulties with their manpower situation when employees go on parental leave. This creates a potential conflict in the interest of society and the interest of employers.

The PSP calls on the Government to introduce greater incentives for family-friendly employers.

For example, we can tilt the balance towards family-friendly employers by providing them with relatively higher access to foreign manpower. We can lower the general S Pass or Work Permit quotas that apply to all employers, while providing additional quotas for employers with employees going on parental leave. If the total parental leave taken by the employees is 30 weeks, employers can be entitled to an additional quota for 60 weeks, to compensate them for the loss in manpower.

## **(11) Provide greater incentives to encourage job-sharing**

The PSP believes that we can do more to encourage job sharing and the adoption of Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) to provide greater workplace support for parents with caregiving responsibilities.

The PSP proposes that companies be allowed to claim 20% of the wages, paid to any flexi-time workers with children, on the condition that these monies are used to employ more full-time or flexi-time workers, from the Government.

We hope that this will incentivise more employers to create flexi-time roles and help workers to better balance their work and family commitments.

## **(12) Reduce statutory working hours from 44 hours to 40 hours per week**

The PSP calls for the statutory number of working hours to be reduced from 44 hours per week to 40 hours per week to better support work-life balance and allow lower-wage workers to be entitled to more hours that are paid at the overtime rate.

Currently, the statutory number of working hours per week is 44, for workers covered under Part 4 of the Employment Act 1968. Such workers include workmen (doing manual labour) earning a monthly basic salary of \$4,500 or less and non-workmen earning a monthly basic salary of \$2,600 or less. Work in excess of 44 hours per week must be paid at the overtime rate, which is at least 1.5 times the hourly basic rate of pay.

If the statutory number of working hours is reduced, workers could be entitled to more overtime pay. For workers earning an hourly wage, the Government should work with tripartite partners to ensure that the reduction in statutory hours does not result in a reduction in the worker's overall salary. For example, if a worker was working 44 hours per week at \$10 per hour, their salary should be increased to \$11 per hour if their total working hours are reduced from 44 hours to 40 hours per week.

### **(13) Increase minimum paid annual leave to 14 days per year for all workers**

The PSP calls for the statutory minimum legal entitlement for paid annual leave to be increased to 14 days per year for all workers, regardless of the number of years of service.

In Singapore, the statutory minimum legal entitlement for paid annual leave is 7 days. This statutory entitlement increases with each year of service, up to 14 days.

As of 2023, the mean number of days of paid annual leave provided to full-time resident employees aged 25 to 64 is 12 days for those earning below \$2,000 a month; 17 days for those earning between \$2,000 to \$4,999 per month; and 21 days for those earning \$5,000 and above per month.

An increase in the minimum number of paid annual leave will especially benefit lower-wage workers, who have a lower median number of days of paid annual leave, and better support all workers in balancing their work and personal needs.

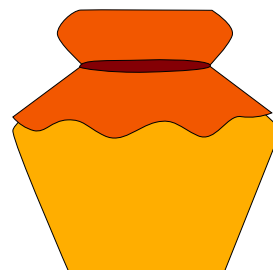
## (14) Increase number of public holidays from 11 to 14

In 1968, in order to ensure Singapore's economic viability after the departure of the British Armed Forces, the number of public holidays was reduced from 16 to 11. At the time, then-Minister for Law and National Development E.W. Barker said, "if our island prospers, I am sure the Government will ask me to come back here and on that day it will be my pleasure to move amendments to increase the number of holidays."

Since 1968, our nation has indeed prospered. However, the number of public holidays still stands at 11, which is lower than many of our Asia-Pacific neighbours. For example, Malaysia observes 14 federal holidays, while Japan has 16. Hong Kong will increase the number of statutory public holidays from 13 to 17 by 2030. Starting in 2025, China has also increased the number of public holidays from 11 to 13, adding Chinese New Year's Eve and an extra day off for Labour Day.

The PSP proposes that the number of public holidays be increased from 11 to 14, with one new holiday for each of the three major ethnic groups. The new holidays should be determined after consulting with representatives of each ethnic group and the Inter-Religious Organisation. The holidays that we adopt can also be aligned with other Asia-Pacific neighbours. Such holidays could include Chinese New Year's Eve, the day after Hari Raya Puasa, and Thaipusam.

More public holidays will benefit all workers and help them maintain work-life balance.



## (15) Implement the “right to disconnect”

The PSP proposes that a “right to disconnect” policy be progressively introduced.

With the rise in digital communications, it has become increasingly difficult for employees to disengage from work. Many receive work-related messages and communications after work hours. This has increasingly blurred the line between work and life.

A “right to disconnect” policy will provide employees with the right to refuse to monitor work-related communications outside of work hours. Such work-related communications would include emails, texts, and phone calls from employers, colleagues, and third parties such as clients and suppliers. Employers would still be allowed to communicate with employees in the case of emergencies.

Under our proposal, the “right to disconnect” could first be introduced for employees on paid leave. This could eventually extend to the right to disconnect between 7pm and 7am or outside the normal working hours of the employee.

# SOCIAL SAFETY NET

For many years, the PAP Government has championed self-reliance instead of building a strong social safety net for Singaporeans, for fear that welfare will reduce Singaporeans' incentive to work. However, it is important for Singapore to have a sufficiently robust social safety net so that no Singaporean is left behind even as our country progresses economically.

The PSP's founder, Dr Tan Cheng Bock, expressed such sentiments in Parliament as early as 1985. At the time, he said, "Running a country is not like running a company. We cannot "sack" our people if they are less effective. Our responsibilities go beyond that. We must help them." Forty years later, this is still the PSP's belief.

Since the 2011 General Election, the PAP Government has taken significant steps to strengthen the social safety net in Singapore. The elderly now receive significant subsidies for their medical bills with the Pioneer Generation Package and Merdeka Generation Package, and MediShield Life has been available since 2014 to help all Singaporeans with hospital bills.

However, many gaps still remain. Retirement adequacy remains a worry for many working Singaporeans. Many are also concerned by the alarming rate of increase in MediShield Life and CareShield Life premiums, and the consequential impact on their retirement as they age. The system of social support schemes is complex and not easy to navigate, especially for those who need help.

In this section, PSP will present our proposals to help strengthen the social safety net for Singaporeans.

## **(1) Simplify the existing multiple overlapping support scheme system to a few national schemes**

The PSP calls on the Government to simplify the existing support scheme system, which has multiple overlapping support schemes, to a few national schemes that can achieve the same objectives of supporting Singaporeans who need help.

There are currently about 60 support schemes and services to help Singaporeans, and slightly more than half of those schemes require applications. Schemes requiring applications include the Community Health Assist Scheme, Public Transport Voucher Scheme, and ComCare Long Term Assistance.

This results in a confusing support scheme system that is challenging to navigate. Such an approach also comes with high administrative costs because external help may be needed to navigate through the maze of eligibility rules. This is especially so for those Singaporeans who are less proficient in English, or do not have the time or energy to determine which schemes they qualify for.

## **(2) Provide Government-paid allowance for full-time caregivers of Singapore Citizen children below age 7**

Full-time caregivers of young children make great unpaid contributions to society. Many parents, especially mothers, choose to sacrifice their careers to bring up their children. Many grandparents also carry out caregiving duties on behalf of full-time working parents, such as bringing the grandchildren to school, minding them after school, and cooking for them.

The PSP proposes that the Government provide a \$1,250 monthly allowance, including CPF contributions, to one parent or grandparent who is the registered full-time caregiver of a Singapore Citizen child from birth until the age of 7. This would provide recognition and real and effective support for these full-time caregivers.

Households who claim this allowance would no longer be eligible for Government subsidies for full-day childcare and infant care programmes.

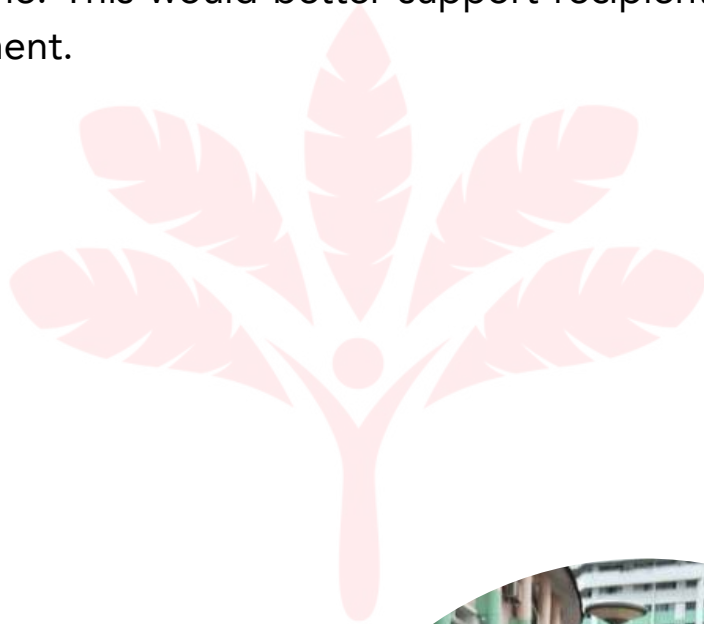
Under such a scheme, a 35-year-old full-time homemaker would receive \$1,000 in cash and \$462.50 in CPF contributions, while a 75-year-old grandparent would receive \$1,156 in cash and \$156 in CPF contributions.

We estimate that even if every eligible household claimed this allowance, this would cost no more than \$2.5 billion per year.

### (3) Double Silver Support Scheme payouts

The Silver Support Scheme supports Singapore Citizens aged 65 and above, who had low incomes during their working years and now have less in retirement. The scheme currently provides quarterly cash payments of \$215 to \$1,080, equating to \$72 to \$360 per month.

The PSP calls for the quarterly cash payouts under the Silver Support Scheme to be doubled to \$430 to \$2,160 (equating to \$144 to \$720 per month), depending on HDB flat type and monthly per capita household income. This would better support recipients in living out a dignified retirement.



#### **(4) Ensure that Pioneer Generation and Merdeka Generation Funds are fully utilised**

The Pioneer Generation Fund (PG Fund) and Merdeka Generation Fund (MG Fund) are endowment funds set aside to fund the Pioneer Generation Package and Merdeka Generation Package, respectively.

As at 31 March 2024, the estimated liabilities of the PG Fund and MG Fund were \$6.11 billion and \$5.78 billion respectively. The fund balances of the PG Fund and MG Fund were \$5.52 billion and \$5.55 billion respectively, but this does not include future investment and interest income.

The Government only publishes the value of the liabilities of the PG and MG Funds. It does not publish the projected investment and interest income of the PG and MG Funds over their remaining lifetimes as these are dependent on the utilisation of the funds and the remaining fund balances.

For transparency, the PSP urges the Government to publish the sum total of the projected investment and interest income and current fund balances so that the public can compare them against the estimated liabilities of both funds.

We also call on the Government to ensure that the PG Fund and MG Fund are fully utilised over the lifetime of the funds, and to make adjustments to the Pioneer Generation Package and Merdeka Generation Package where necessary to ensure this.

## **(5) Set up the CPF Lifetime Retirement Investment Scheme**

In 2016, the CPF Advisory Board recommended the introduction of a new Lifetime Retirement Investment Scheme (LRIS), a recommendation which was accepted by the Government. The PSP calls on the Government to set up the LRIS as soon as possible.

Under the LRIS, CPF members would be allowed to invest some of their CPF savings in simple-to-understand, low-fee, well-diversified, and professionally managed life cycle investment products. Such products would be passively managed and carefully selected by the CPF Board. The funds would most likely invest in higher-risk, higher-return assets such as equities when the CPF member is younger and lower-risk, lower-return assets such as bonds when they are closer to retirement age. Similar funds are offered by the Australian superannuation scheme or the 401(k) scheme in the United States.

The LRIS would be an additional option for CPF members to grow their investable CPF savings and potentially earn higher returns. According to statistics published by the US Department of Labor, 401(k) plans returned about 6-10% per annum when the rate of return is assessed over a five-year period.

While the returns each year will be much more volatile than a fixed interest rate from CPF, it should be possible to earn a higher return through the Lifetime Retirement Investment Scheme over 30 or 40 years. The LRIS can also help grow Singapore's local fund management industry and reduce the number of Singaporeans that are over-invested in property.

## **(6) Expand the use of MediSave**

As of 2021, MediSave account holders have accumulated \$118 billion in balances. However, only \$1.1 billion, or less than 1%, was withdrawn for direct medical expenses that year. This is a tiny percentage which is less than the interest earned by Singaporeans each year on their MediSave balances, and a decrease from 2015 when \$905 million or 1.2% was withdrawn from a \$76 billion balance.

Under the MediSave500/700 scheme, MediSave account holders are allowed to withdraw \$500 per year for outpatient services to treat non-complex conditions, or \$700 per year for complex chronic conditions per annum per patient.

The PSP calls for withdrawal limits under the MediSave 500/700 scheme to be increased, given Singapore's ageing population and the increasing demand for healthcare, coupled with the fact that Singaporeans are not fully utilising the interest they earn each year on their MediSave balances for medical expenses.

The PSP also calls on the Government to expand the use of MediSave by expanding the range of outpatient treatments that are covered under MediSave, such as basic preventive and non-aesthetic dental treatments that do not involve surgery, such as root canal treatments, crowning, and denturing. Many preventive dental procedures can be expensive and are generally not claimable under the MediSave scheme.

The Government has recognised that oral health is an integral part of overall health and wellbeing. In Budget 2025, the Government extended CHAS subsidies for basic and preventive dental procedures to CHAS Orange cardholders. Expanding the MediSave scheme to cover preventative dental procedures will help Singaporeans better cope with the rising out-of-pocket costs of such treatments.

Additionally, the PSP proposes to allow maternity and child-bearing medical fees to be fully claimable from MediSave without limit, and to allow women to use MediSave for elective egg freezing procedures.

Elective egg freezing procedures provide women with the option to preserve fertility and their chances of having children later in life, but are currently very costly in Singapore. Allowing MediSave to be used for such procedures would help to defray these expenses.

## **(7) More financial support for couples facing fertility issues**

The Government currently provides up to 75% in co-funding for couples using Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) at public hospitals, provided that couples must be under the age of 40 and met the clinical requirements for ART. The amount of co-funding provided is reduced if one spouse is a Permanent Resident or a foreigner. Co-funding is provided for a maximum of 3 fresh and 3 frozen ART cycles. The last two co-funded cycles can be completed after age 40 as long as ART or IUI procedures have been attempted before age 40.

The PSP believes that we can do more to support couples facing fertility issues given our falling fertility rates. The PSP proposes to allow all couples to receive up to 75% co-funding for assisted conception procedures as long as one spouse is a Singapore Citizen.

Government co-funding should be provided for an unlimited number of ART cycles for women under the age of 40, until they have had two children who are Singapore Citizens.

For women from age 40 to 45, Government co-funding should be provided for three fresh and three frozen ART cycles.

## **(8) Strengthen support for mental health services**

More can be done to strengthen support for mental health and psychological services. The PSP proposes to provide greater financial support for those seeking help with their mental health.

Currently, patients with schizophrenia, major depression, bipolar disorder and anxiety can withdraw up to S\$500 from MediSave each year to defray the cost of treatments under the Chronic Disease Management Programme (CDMP). The PSP calls for these limits to be increased to reduce out-of-pocket costs for patients, due to the high cost of treatments for mental health conditions, such as counselling, therapy, and medications.

The Government should also officially regulate the provision of mental health services by counsellors, which is currently self-regulated. This will strengthen protections for consumers and provide practitioners with greater recognition.

We also call on the Government to increase the number of mental health professionals in public hospitals and reduce the waiting times for new subsidised appointments with mental health professionals. The average median waiting time for such an appointment with a psychiatrist at a public hospital has increased from 27 days in 2018 to 47 in 2023, while the average median waiting time to see a psychologist at a public hospital increased from 28 days in 2018 to 36 days in 2023. This is not acceptable.

With rising societal pressures and mental health conditions becoming increasingly prevalent, it is vital for the Government to improve access to mental health services in the public healthcare system.

# EDUCATION

In many respects, Singapore's education system is the envy of the world. Our students were ranked No. 1 for mathematics, science and reading in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022, a study conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

However, this success has not been unequivocal. Our students spend many hours at private tuition, which also comes at great cost to their parents. Private tuition has become a billion-dollar industry, and average monthly household expenditure on private tuition has increased 19% from \$88.40 in 2017/18 to \$104.80 in 2023, based on the Household Expenditure Survey. Our students perform very well academically but struggle in other areas. Based on PISA's assessment, Singapore students could do better in resilience, maintaining a balance between school and leisure, and having a growth mindset instead of being fearful of failure.

The PSP believes that systemic changes to our education system are required to ensure that it remains holistic and supportive of students. Our education system should provide multiple paths to success, so that Singaporeans can achieve their fullest potential in whichever way suits them best.

Our education system should also be flexible enough to allow entry and exit points throughout an individual's formal educational journey, with SkillsFuture coming into play seamlessly once the individual enters the workforce, so that the goal of self-directed lifelong learning becomes integral to Singapore's education philosophy.

Additionally, we must do more to ensure that opportunities in our education system remain open to every Singaporean student, regardless of how wealthy or well-educated their parents are.

Our education system should be a social leveller, and not entrench social stratification or an elitist culture.

In this section, the PSP will share our policy proposals on how the education system can be improved to be more holistic and to better support Singaporeans in achieving their best.

## **(1) Introduce a 10-year through-train programme (where taking PSLE is optional)**

The PSP has repeatedly called on the Government to pilot a 10-year through-train programme, in which the PSLE is optional. Not all students under 13 years of age respond well to the stress of high-stakes examinations, and the stress of the PSLE is arguably not age-appropriate.

There is no one school in Singapore that can cater to all learners. The PSP proposes that a 10-year through-train programme, without PSLE, be piloted in some schools.

This pilot programme will provide students and parents with a choice: they can choose to allow their children not to take the PSLE and go through 10 years of education in schools that support assessments that are benchmarked against real-life skills and contexts, or go the traditional PSLE route. This will be vastly different from our current system, which denies parents the choice of not letting their children take PSLE.

Furthermore, the 10-year through-train programme will allow us to provide students with a more diverse curriculum. This would include offering a wider range of subjects to students and greater flexibility in their choices and combinations.

Under our current primary school system, students are offered nine subjects, but only four are assessed in the PSLE. Art, Music, Physical Education, Social Studies, and Character and Citizenship Education are not. Such treatment skews time and effort towards the four core subjects that are tested at the PSLE: English Language, Mother Tongue Language, Mathematics, and Science.

A 10-year through-train programme would enable all subjects to be equally emphasised at the primary school level. It would also allow students to better develop themselves in the arts, humanities, and sports, which are areas that are currently not tested at the PSLE and arguably given less attention by students and parents today.

A through-train programme does not mean that students will not have to sit for any academic assessments. Under the pilot programme, internal school examinations will continue to provide regular academic checkpoints for students.

If, at any point before the PSLE, students or their parents feel that their needs are not being met by the through-train programme and wish to return to the PSLE track, they should be provided with the option of transferring back to the PSLE track at another school based on their internal school examination results.

A 10-year through-train programme would be a game-changer for students and parents. If primary school students do not have to spend many months preparing for a major examination like the PSLE, we can direct their energies toward a more holistic development and better equip them to thrive in a more complex world.

## (2) Allow for a range of school sizes, not just big schools

Currently, MOE routinely merges schools if they begin to get too small because of falling birth rates and changing demographics of housing estates. The merger and disappearance of schools results in a loss of heritage and identity for former students.

The PSP calls on the Government to re-evaluate whether schools should be closed or merged once they get too small. We believe that our education system should have a range of schools of different sizes in tune with our learning demographics.

Under such a system, families can then choose from a variety of schools that best fit their children's profiles. Some schools could offer non-PSLE routes; others can allow neurotypical and neurodivergent children to study together.

Smaller schools also have their benefits, such as creating a stronger sense of community and belonging for students, and could be safe havens for children whose needs go unaddressed in big spaces and big class sizes, as they allow for deeper connections between staff and students.

### **(3) Overhaul the role of assessments in education**

The PSP calls on the Government to fundamentally rethink and overhaul the role of assessments in the education system.

Our educational outcomes are fundamentally linked to what gets tested. And what gets tested is what gets taught to students.

The prevalence of high-stakes examinations in our education system has also resulted in Singapore students having a higher fear of failure compared to students in other countries. The 2018 PISA study found that Singaporean students are among the most afraid of failure in the world.

To enable our students to succeed in a rapidly changing and increasingly complex world, we need to equip them with a wide-ranging set of skills and aptitudes, including critical thinking, collaborative problem-solving, and creativity. Tests and examinations are not the best way to ensure students have these skills.

The PSP believes that we need to reduce the reliance on summative examinations in assessing the performance of students. We should increase the role of alternative assessment methods such as portfolios and projects. Such alternative assessment methods help students to acquire the skills needed to adapt to change and stay relevant throughout their working lives, and also reduce the impact of failure.

## **(4) Reduce class sizes**

The PSP calls for smaller class sizes in order to introduce greater opportunities for diversity and differentiated learning into our education system.

In 2023, the average class size was 33.6 in primary schools and 32.6 in secondary schools. As of 2022, there were about 15 students per teacher at the primary level and 12.5 students per teacher at the secondary level.

As Singapore's Total Fertility Rate falls, the number of school-going children decreases, which would have been a good opportunity to decrease class sizes. Instead, MOE has instead closed schools and reduced teacher recruitment. The number of education officers dropped from 36,400 in 2016 to 31,382 in 2023. The NIE intake dropped from 1,256 in 2016 to below 600 each year from 2017 to 2022, before increasing to 1,204 in 2023.

The PSP also calls on the Government to create more opportunities for older teachers to be re-employed as Flexi-Adjunct Teachers. This would include re-employing teachers who may have left the Education Service for some years. This will ensure that the reduction in class sizes will not come at the expense of teachers spending more time teaching classes if there are the same number of teachers, or the quality of the teaching workforce or less manpower for other sectors if there were more teachers.

The Government should also look into using technology to streamline teachers' administrative duties so that they can devote more time to teaching students.

## **(5) Enhance mental health and well-being for students and teachers**

In 2021 and 2024, the PSP called on the Government to implement measures to monitor our students' mental well-being regularly and systematically, in the same way that academic achievements and physical fitness are monitored every year. We repeat this call today.

The PSP believes that conducting a mental health assessment each year using developed tools will guide teachers in identifying students who need help and allow professionals to proactively reach out to them. This is especially crucial to prevent tragic incidents from occurring, as only 1.5% of students approach their school counsellors for help in each year since 2020. Currently, two-thirds of all schools have only one trained school counsellor. The PSP believes that there should be a minimum of two school counsellors per school.

Teachers' mental and emotional well-being should also be a focus area. The Government should implement annual feedback mechanisms for MOE teachers that are conducted by an external organisation, where explicit questions relating to workload and burnout, such as "why would you stay" and "why would you leave", should be asked.

## **(6) Reduce tuition grants and scholarships to foreign students**

The PSP proposes that we further limit the access of international students to scholarships or tuition grants, and convert more international students to become full-fee payers, especially those who can afford to do so.

Currently, about 10% of students enrolled in Singapore's Autonomous Universities (AUs) at the undergraduate level are international students. Of these, only about 20% pay full fees. The remainder receive scholarships or tuition grants, which require them to work in Singapore upon graduation, as part of their bond obligations. As of 2019, the nominal value of the scholarships and tuition grants to the students amounted to about \$238 million.

The PSP does not advocate for a policy of zero international students at our AUs, or to send back international students. Our AUs have achieved excellent global rankings and charge tuition fees that are comparable to that of universities in other English-speaking countries such as Australia, the UK, or the US. Therefore, the PSP believes that our AUs will still be attractive to many international students, even if they are not provided with generous access to scholarships and tuition grants.

Full fee-paying international students are an important source of revenue for universities in countries such as the UK and Australia. As our AUs progress in global rankings, we should develop this source of revenue and use it to further subsidise the education of local students.

## (7) Review the number of university places for Singaporeans

The PSP agrees with the Government that no Singaporean student should ever be displaced from an Institute of Higher Learning (IHL), including our Autonomous Universities (AUs), because of an international student.

We believe that a Singaporean student who can qualify for a place at one of our Autonomous Universities (AUs) should always be prioritised over a foreign student.

Additionally, even though the number of IHL places are planned with Singaporean students in mind, the PSP believes that we should periodically review the number of AU places for Singaporean students, especially in courses such as Medicine.

We believe that our AUs should always have sufficient places to cater to demand from Singaporean students, without compromising on the quality of education and the rigour of the curriculum.

## **(8) Expand on non-academic-based pathways to university admission**

The PSP calls for the expansion of non-academic and vocation-based pathways to university admission. We recognise that vocational and skills-based pathways are just as important as academic pathways, and we are encouraged to see that Singapore is recognising the value of a vocational education.

While the Government has attempted to create recognition of vocational skill-sets through the Workforce Skills Qualification (WSQ) programme, the PSP does not think that this goes far enough.

We can expand the WSQ programme, such that WSQ qualifications can provide sufficient training and experience to be recognised as a valid credential to meet admission requirements for our local universities. This could be similar to the federal vocational baccalaureate in Switzerland, which provides access to universities without the need for an entrance exam.

We believe that this will better enable Singaporeans to up-skill, even if they have not gone through the traditional academic pathways.

# GOVERNANCE

The People's Action Party has enjoyed a super-majority in Singapore's Parliament for almost 60 years. For long periods, more than 90% of the seats were occupied by PAP MPs, and there were either zero or just one or two Opposition MPs. This has enabled the PAP to amend the Constitution at will, as this only requires a two-thirds majority of MPs.

This has led many Singaporeans to feel that there is a lack of sufficient checks and balances on the Government.

These perceptions are based on several facts.

For example, some state institutions which are independent in other countries, such as the Elections Department, report to the Prime Minister in Singapore. Many laws provide the Government with sweeping powers. There are no parliamentary committees that review all legislation before they are debated at Second and Third Readings.

On top of these concerns over transparency and accountability, fresh concerns over competence in policy execution have recently arisen on the backs of costly mistakes. These range from the outbreak of Covid-19 in migrant worker dormitories in mid-2020, the use of TraceTogether data for police investigations despite assurances to the contrary, the reversal of LTA's decision to switch to SimplyGo after adverse public feedback, to the saga over the unmasking of National Registration Identity Card (NRIC) numbers in December 2024.

The PSP believes that good governance requires strict adherence to our Constitution, which is the supreme law of the land that governs all other pieces of legislation in Singapore.

To ensure that the Constitution cannot be amended by the ruling party at will, we need to ensure that more than one-third of seats in Parliament are occupied by Opposition MPs. For this General Election, this means that we need to elect at least 33 Opposition MPs.

In this section, we put forth policy proposals to strengthen governmental accountability and policy outcomes in Singapore. Taken together, these changes will enhance our never-ending march to build a democratic society, based on justice and equality, which our National Pledge calls on us to do.

## **(1) Reform of ministerial salaries**

Ministerial salaries are currently benchmarked to the incomes of top earners in Singapore. At the entry-level MR4 ministerial grade, ministers earn 60% of the median income of the top 1,000 Singapore Citizen income earners. The PSP proposes that the benchmark for ministerial salaries be changed to the median income of Singapore Citizens.

We believe that our proposal would better reflect the spirit of public service. Ministerial salaries should be benchmarked to the incomes of regular Singaporean workers, rather than an elite core of Singaporeans.

## **(2) Public asset declarations for all Members of Parliament**

The PSP calls for legislation to be enacted to require all Members of Parliament (MPs) to publicly declare any assets which may conflict, or may be seen to conflict, with their public duties as an MP after every General Election. This includes financial assets, non-financial assets, and company directorships. These declarations would be disclosed in a publicly accessible Register of Interests maintained by Parliament, subject to some restrictions for reasons of privacy.

Such declarations are already being done in other Commonwealth jurisdictions. For example, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand all maintain Registers of Interests where MPs are required to publicly disclose any financial interests that are relevant to their work as MPs.

PSP's proposed reform would help to reinforce public confidence in our anti-corruption regime by addressing any concerns in any quarters about unexplained wealth or possible corruption.

### **(3) Increase accountability for our Sovereign Wealth Funds (SWFs): Temasek and GIC**

The PSP proposes that representatives of Temasek and the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation (GIC) be subject to regular, closed-door hearings by Members of Parliament (MPs) sitting on one of the relevant bipartisan Parliamentary standing committees, subject to the Official Secrets Act 1935 to protect commercially-sensitive secrets.

Temasek and GIC are currently managed by their management and Boards. The Government has said that it generally does not intervene in matters that should be the prerogative of the Board. For example, in 2017, the Government said: “The important thing to understand is that Temasek operates as a commercial entity. So, this is not something where the Government interferes with that management.”

However, Temasek and GIC manage public monies, unlike private funds who are accountable to their shareholders. Ultimately, both Temasek and GIC should be answerable to the people (through their elected representatives). The mechanisms for accountability for their investment outcomes should be strengthened.

Private, closed-door hearings of Temasek and GIC representatives by MPs would provide MPs with the opportunity to raise questions on the performance of these two companies relative to reasonable global benchmarks, as well as their performance on governance, risk management and ethics metrics.

For example, at the closed-door hearings, questions could be asked about the performance of Temasek relative to US stock market indices and the Norwegian sovereign wealth funds, as well as the substantial share of equity in non-listed companies within Temasek’s portfolio. Summaries of these hearings could then be published publicly.

The PSP further proposes that the salaries of senior management at Temasek and GIC be published in ranges, in lines with best practice requirements set for SGX-listed companies. This will ensure that our SWFs achieve the same level of transparency as SGX-listed companies.

#### **(4) Enact a Freedom of Information Act**

The PSP calls for the enactment of a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Such an Act can be found in other electoral democracies. An FOIA would empower citizens to seek information from the Government for purposes of public policy debate, holding the government to account, or for other legitimate reasons.

Under the FOIA, the Government would be legally obliged to share the requested information with the petitioner unless it can convince the Court that there are legitimate reasons, such as national security, for denying the request, in whole or in part.

Greater access to information is necessary to realise the promise of “a democratic society” enshrined in our National Pledge. A healthy democracy cannot exist if the Government conceals information from its citizens, thus depriving them of the lifeblood for accountability, reasoned debate and consensus formation.

#### **(5) Automatically declassify documents older than 25 years**

Currently, only a small percentage of documents that are older than 25 years are declassified and made available to researchers.

The PSP calls for all documents that are older than 25 years to be automatically declassified unless there are legitimate reasons, such as national security. Such documents should then be made available upon request to all citizens.

## (6) Media reform

The PSP calls for reforms to the media regime to foster diversity, balance and healthy competition.

SPH Media Trust is currently being financially supported by the taxpayer to the tune of \$900 million over 5 years from 2022, of which \$320 million was disbursed in 2022-2023. The Government also allocated \$310 million annually to fund what it calls “public service broadcasting” by MediaCorp. However, despite the injection of taxpayer funds, there is still a perception that the quality of journalism among the mainstream media has not improved. For example, The Straits Times’ “From the Gallery” column, which provided opinions on Parliamentary proceedings, has disappeared, while commentators have noted that news articles increasingly read like government press releases.

We believe that quality journalism is essential to our national well-being, and that Singaporeans are better served by a media landscape that contains more diversity and healthy competition.

To that end, we call for reforms to the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act 1974 to remove the requirement for management shares to be given to persons approved by the Minister, while ensuring that broadsheet newspapers remain controlled by Singapore citizens or companies controlled by Singapore citizens.

The regime for granting licences for the production and distribution of broadsheet newspapers should be substantially liberalised, while retaining restrictions on foreign funding.

The market should be the main arbiter of which print newspapers reach Singaporeans. This would be subject to oversight by a new independent press standards committee.

This independent press standards committee should be appointed and funded by Parliament, with committee members serving fixed terms of 5 years and shielded from interference from all political figures.

This independent press standards committee would handle complaints on journalistic reporting accuracy, fairness and ethics. In addition, it would enforce a code of journalistic integrity approved by Parliament. This code should include the clear public labelling of paid/sponsored content, as well as prohibitions against foreign interference and the use of executive power or other forms of non-transparent power to influence media reporting.

The Broadcasting Act 1994 should also be significantly changed to liberalise the regulatory framework applied to significant local online news content providers in 2013.

We should remove the requirement for Government approval for company directors and shareholders, provided these are Singapore citizens or companies controlled by Singapore citizens. The performance bond should be reduced from \$50,000 to \$20,000 to encourage news content start-ups. The requirement for news content providers to remove prohibited content within 24 hours should be reviewed with a view to deploy these powers in only the most serious cases affecting, for example, racial and religious harmony as well as national security, with all other cases handled by the independent press standards committee.

Government grants should be directed to proactively nurture new, high-quality digital local home-grown media start-ups, so as to foster diversity and healthy competition in the media landscape. There have been examples of such local media start-ups in recent years, and they would benefit from government funding. Various government bodies routinely provide such grants to start-ups across a range of industries, and it would not be new to extend them to the media industry.

## **(7) Reform the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act 2019**

The PSP calls for reforms to the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act 2019 (POFMA) to ensure transparency, accountability and fairness. We repeat our call that the power to declare statements as false and to order Directions under POFMA be vested in the Judiciary instead of the Government, and that POFMA should be used only in cases where there is a deliberate campaign to perpetuate falsehoods.

While the PSP agrees that the Government should have powers to act fast to prevent the spread of fake news, we do not agree that the Government should have the right to be an arbiter of truth and declare statements as false at the first instance without any judicial oversight, considering the fact that such powers compel the individual or entity to state that they have spread falsehoods, even if they disagree.

Prior to the enactment of POFMA, the Government had various levers to enforce its right of reply to reports published by the news media, through the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act 1974 and accreditations for news journalists. With the rise of the internet and social media, the Government continues to have the ability to issue a right of reply to online articles, albeit without the right to have its reply published by the same entity that issued the initial article.

The PSP's view is that post-enactment, POFMA has had a chilling effect on free speech. POFMA does not provide objective criteria explaining how a statement is determined to be false or misleading, and many are wary of expressing their views publicly for fear of running afoul of POFMA.

While unfettered free speech can be potentially detrimental to a society, any limits placed on Singaporeans' Constitutional right to free speech must be carefully calibrated to balance one's right to express one's views and the undoubted benefits of the free exchange of ideas, opinions and views without fear of retaliation, censorship or legal sanction against the need to stop the deliberate spread of falsehoods.

The PSP's calls for reform to POFMA seeks to strike a better balance between the two.

## **(8) Abolish Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs)**

The PSP repeats our call that GRCs be abolished.

We strongly believe in the need for multi-racial representation in Parliament. However, we believe that the GRC system is not the best way to achieve this. We believe that the GRC system has allowed some members to enter Parliament on the coattails of other more established or popular team members. With the increase in the percentage of MPs elected from GRCs over the years, Singapore's political development has been hampered as higher and higher hurdles have been set for opposition parties.

In the 14th Parliament from 2020 to 2025, there were six vacancies that were unfilled because the Members of Parliament who resigned were elected from GRCs. No by-elections were held to fill these vacancies, because by-elections are not required where a vacancy arises in a GRC. While this prevents any individual MP in a GRC from holding the other MPs in the same GRC to ransom by resigning, it also has the effect of depriving residents in these GRCs of their elected representative in Parliament, which is highly undesirable given our system of representative democracy.

*The PSP proposed 2 possible alternatives to the GRC system in 2023:*

**1. An NCMP scheme for minorities, similar to the current NCMP scheme for opposition candidates.**

Under this scheme, all constituencies revert to being SMCs, and minority candidates will contest in SMCs just like other candidates. If not enough minority candidates are elected, minority candidates who did not win but had the highest percentage of votes can be appointed NCMPs to ensure adequate minority representation in Parliament.

**2. A hybrid electoral system containing both elements of First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation.**

Under this system, each voter will have two ballots instead of one. A proportion of Parliamentary seats can be filled using the party list system while others can be filled using our existing FPTP system.

The first ballot will be to vote for a candidate in a local SMC. The candidate with the most votes is elected. We can mandate that at least 50%, 12% and 6% of each political party's candidates running in SMCs must be from the Chinese, Malay and Indian/Other communities. This would protect the multi-racial composition of Parliament with reference to Singapore's ethnic demographics.

The second ballot will be to vote for a party at the national level. Each political party will put forth a list of candidates for election. Voters vote for their desired political party. Seats are then allocated to each political party based on their national vote share, e.g. a party that obtains 10% of the national votes will be allocated 10% of the seats.

Each party list must be multi-racial with minimum racial representation requirements for each party list (e.g. at least 50% Chinese, 12% Malay, and 6% Indian/Other). Based on the seats allocated, each party then selects the candidates on its party list to take up the seats.

## (9) Reform how electoral boundaries are determined

The PSP repeats its call for reforms to the electoral boundaries review process, in order to increase the transparency and fairness of the electoral boundary review process for all political parties.

*The PSP made the following proposals to reform the electoral boundaries review process in 2024:*

1. Requiring the formation of the Electoral Boundaries Review Committee (EBRC) to be immediately announced;
2. Requiring the EBRC to publish the current number of voters in each constituency based on boundaries in the last GE upon its formation;
3. Requiring the EBRC to publicly and sufficiently explain all changes to electoral boundaries;
4. Require each MP to represent 30,000 voters, with a deviation of +/- 10% instead of the current +/- 30%;
5. Imposing a minimum time frame from finalising electoral boundaries to the General Election;
6. Codifying the membership of the EBRC into law, with the EBRC being chaired by a High Court Judge and four other members being the CEOs of ELD, HDB and SLA, and the Chief Statistician;
7. If GRCs are not abolished, to introduce the concept of *major boundaries* and *minor boundaries*.

Under the PSP's proposal, major boundaries are meant to remain unchanged for many elections. Each region bound by major boundaries could contain one or two GRCs and a few SMCs. These major boundaries could take reference from existing HDB town boundaries, URA planning area boundaries and postal district boundaries.

The PSP proposes that major boundaries cannot be changed unless the changes are agreed to by a bipartisan committee comprising equal numbers of representatives from the ruling party and other political parties that have won at least 5% of the national vote at the previous GE. The minor boundaries of GRCs and SMCs within a major boundary can be adjusted by the EBRC to reflect population changes.

We believe that these reforms would strengthen our political system and ensure that fairer outcomes from our electoral system for all voters.

### **(10) Depoliticise the People's Association**

The PSP calls for the People's Association (PA) to be delinked from political figures from any political party.

Grassroots Advisors should be public servants who undertake work for the PA in the same way that civil service and public service managers do for any other statutory board. Political officeholders and MPs should also be excluded from the PA Board of Management.

PA is a statutory board that manages Singapore's community clubs and grassroots organisations and works to help the elected government of the day to explain and implement key policies and programmes.

Even though the PA is politically neutral and does not conduct activities with any political party, it appoints Grassroots Advisers at the constituency level who are typically either Members of Parliament from the ruling party or candidates from the ruling party who lost the election in that constituency.

The PA and its grassroots organisations (such as the Community Club Management Committees, Residents' Committees, and Citizens' Consultative Committees) do not frequently work with Opposition MPs in their capacity as MP on public events and programs. It is the appointed Grassroots Adviser who is allowed to organise community events with PA.

The Government makes available funds to all town councils for community improvement upgrading projects, but the use of these funds must be considered by the Grassroots Advisers. In constituencies held by the ruling party, the MP and the Grassroots Adviser are the same person, but this is not the case in constituencies held by the Opposition.

Such a policy helps to build political capital for the ruling party during constituency PA events and programs, as representatives of the ruling party are publicly visible.

This makes for neither fair politics nor optimal fostering of "one united people" regardless of political affiliation.

The removal of all politicians from the PA's organisational structure means that it can better address its mission of building social capital devoid of any perception of politicisation.

## **(11) Enact a law to mandate Environmental Impact Assessments before major development works**

The PSP proposes enacting a law to mandate that Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) be conducted prior to any land reclamation or development works on greenfield land, or in territorial waters.

Such EIAs should rigorously evaluate the impact of the proposed works on biodiversity, ecosystem function, and carbon emissions, based on the latest internationally-recognised best practices.

The full reports for such EIAs should be made publicly available (with redactions made for national security or commercial sensitivity concerns where absolutely necessary) at least 2 months before the final approval for the commencement of work is made, to allow NGOs and concerned citizens to provide feedback to the authorities as well as to allow MPs to raise questions on the proposals in Parliament where necessary.

## **(12) Lower the voting age to 18**

The PSP calls for the voting age to be lowered to 18.

The vast majority of the world's electoral democracies set the voting age at 18 years. In this respect, Singapore is an outlier by setting our voting age at 21.

Furthermore, many male Singaporeans begin serving National Service at the age of 18. It is unacceptable that we entrust 18-year-olds with the defence of Singapore, but not the right to vote to choose their government and elected representatives.

### **(13) Forming a Parliament Research Service**

The PSP proposes the creation of a Parliament Research Service (PRS) to support the Parliamentary work of both Opposition and ruling party backbench Members of Parliament (MPs), as is the case in other democracies. Experienced researchers from other government departments and Ministries, such as the Singapore Legal Service or the Department of Statistics, could be seconded to work in the PRS.

MPs in Parliament currently do not enjoy the support of a dedicated Parliamentary research organisation to conduct research in support of their Parliamentary interventions on matters of policy.

The allowances provided to MPs for legislative and secretarial assistants are insufficient to support the hiring of full-time researchers or the engagement of third-party vendors for significant research projects. Proper taxpayer-funded professional research support would benefit both ruling party backbench MPs and opposition MPs and improve the quality of debate in Parliament.

### **(14) Forming Parliamentary Standing Committees to scrutinise legislation in greater detail**

The PSP proposes the creation of permanent bipartisan standing committees to scrutinise all legislation. These committees can be formed along Ministry lines, with each committee tasked to oversee Parliamentary work related to one or several Ministries, based on overlaps of subject matter.

Such standing committees should have two calendar months to scrutinise legislation between First and Second Readings in Parliament, with exceptions made for Bills that have the President's approval for urgent passage.

These Parliamentary Standing Committees should also be empowered to subpoena the testimony of expert witnesses and seek research support from the PSP's proposed Parliament Research Service.

This proposal is not new. It has been raised multiple times by Opposition MPs in Parliament. Similar committees can be found in many other democracies, where they are seen as a vital ingredient in the legislative process.

Such reforms are required for the following reasons:

1. Currently, Parliament has approximately a month to study new Bills after they have been tabled for First Reading, before the Bills are then debated on at Second and Third Reading. The Second and Third Readings usually occur concurrently, often in the course of a single day, even for contentious legislation such as the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act 2021 or the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act 2019.
2. MPs generally do not have the benefit of directly engaging the civil servants who drafted the Bill to delve into technical questions and concerns. These questions and concerns can only be raised to the political officeholders when the Bill is debated in Parliament at the Second or Third Reading.
3. MPs are also not empowered to subpoena expert witnesses to share their inputs with them on pending legislation.
4. Moreover, MPs generally do not receive an advance copy of the Second Reading speeches that Ministers make to provide context on the legislation being debated. MPs have to revise their speeches posing questions and concerns immediately after the Minister's Second Reading speech.

## **(15) The Speaker of Parliament should be non-partisan**

The PSP repeats our call that the Speaker of Parliament be a non-partisan figure.

During the debate on our Parliamentary motion filed in August 2023, the PSP argued that the Speaker should be constitutionally required to become non-partisan rather than affiliated to any party, for the duration of time that he or she is Speaker. He or she should not be prevented from becoming a Party-affiliated MP once again after serving his or her term as Speaker. The PSP's view is that such requirements are necessary to ensure the Speaker's impartiality, and to ensure that the Speaker is seen by the public as impartial in the discharge of his or her duties.

Prior to 1970, all Speakers of Parliament had been non-partisan members of the legal profession, with the exception of a brief period between 1963 and 1964 when Mr E.W. Barker, a PAP member, was Speaker. By having a non-partisan Speaker, we would return to earlier traditions practised before the PAP achieved a supermajority in Parliament in the late 1960s.

# FOR COUNTRY FOR PEOPLE



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