



MAKE YOUR VOTE COUNT

THE WORKERS' PARTY
MANIFESTO 2020

PREAMBLE: A SINGAPORE FOR ALL

This is our vision for Singapore:

- Singaporeans must be enabled to achieve their dreams: starting from our ***schools*** to ensure all our children are given the right tools and support to fulfil their potential and ambitions, and having social policies that support *hardworking families* to achieve their dreams.
- We must forge a dynamic economy with competitive, locally-based firms that can withstand global and internal forces of change, while providing ***dignified jobs for our workers.***
- We will work together to build the home that we want: ***tackling the cost of living***, having a robust health and social care system, with sustainable and affordable housing and *liveable communities*.
- An accountable democracy and resilient Singapore is one where ***robust political, governance and defence institutions*** protect our security. We should embrace a diversity of views and encourage robust debate about the way forward.

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CHAPTER 1:

TACKLING COVID-19 AND THRIVING IN A POST-COVID WORLD

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused widespread economic and social disruption across the globe. It is a public health emergency which could overwhelm Singapore's healthcare system if not adequately managed. Restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the disease have dealt a terrible blow to our economy and hurt the livelihoods of many Singaporeans.

We acknowledge the government's efforts so far in dealing with this crisis. We support the safe distancing measures put in place to contain Covid-19 and urge fellow Singaporeans to comply with them — for their own safety and that of the rest of the community.

At the same time, although the crisis is still ongoing, it is our duty as a responsible opposition party to make a constructive contribution to the policy discussion on how best to deal with this outbreak and emerge stronger as a nation.

TACKLING THE CRISIS

The Covid-19 pandemic required a decisive and effective response, and any easing of restrictions need to finely calibrate kick-starting the economy while ensuring we do not face a second runaway wave of infections. It is equally important that this, and any future pandemics, must strengthen — not weaken — our social harmony and resilience as a people. Singaporeans must resolve to work together as a nation to defeat pandemics, not as individuals weathering the storm on their own.

Listen to medical experts

The initial governmental advice telling people not to wear masks unless they are feeling unwell appears to have been driven more by concerns about a shortage of masks.

Ten weeks after the first Covid-19 case was recorded in Singapore, the government abruptly changed its position and announced the distribution of reusable masks to all residents. Would many infections have been prevented if the advice had been given earlier to wear masks to cut down the risk of infection, as advised by some doctors from the beginning?

Covid-19 is first and foremost a public health crisis. The key solutions to resolving this crisis will come from medical experts. In the event of future pandemics, we recommend the formation of an independent medical advisory board making both public and private recommendations to the government's medical team, to act as a source of alternative perspectives and advice to the government's doctors, and to pre-empt any possible blind spots. A whole-of-society response would benefit from non-political, medical figures fronting everyday behavioural advice to the general public.

Expand testing for Covid-19

Recent studies have found that a significant percentage of individuals testing positive for Covid-19 are asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic. There is strong evidence that asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic persons can transmit the virus in the community.

Because of this, Singapore should continue to expand its current testing regime to include more wide-spread community testing for the coronavirus. This involves testing a large number of people within the community, including those who may not present symptoms. By pre-emptively identifying individuals who carry the virus, authorities can isolate and care for them, and perform contact tracing, and thus further stem the spread of the virus. This should be done in parallel with existing testing, treatment and contact tracing for symptomatic individuals.

Communities which are at higher risk of infection should be prioritised for such testing. All individuals who report even mild symptoms should be swabbed, as should their close contacts. As our testing capacity increases, more random tests in the community should be conducted to identify asymptomatic cases. When our borders are eventually opened, all incoming travellers must be tested and cleared before being allowed to mingle in the local community. A national effort to leverage domestic biomedical R&D and manufacturing resources should be made to ramp up production of test kits to make this possible.

Expanded community testing will enable the health authorities to more precisely identify and isolate infected individuals, which would facilitate a safer re-opening of our battered economy.

Implement effective contact tracing while safeguarding privacy

Rapid contact tracing holds the other key to enable a safer and wider re-opening of the economy. Manual methods of contact tracing can take too long to be effective, especially if the number of cases balloons as restrictions are eased. Technology can enable contact tracers to much more quickly identify contacts and call them in for testing.

The current adoption rate of the TraceTogether app falls far short of the level needed for it to be effective. Furthermore, TraceTogether works poorly on iPhones because Apple's security features prevent the app from working in the background.

Many countries plan to use the Apple and Google Exposure Notifications Service (ENS) in their contact tracing apps, which holds potential for cross-border interoperability. While an ENS-based solution would have been preferable for reasons of cost and convenience, with wearable devices given only to those who do not own smartphones, the key now is to ensure widespread use of the nationally adopted contact tracing solution, minimising attempts at evasion. To that end, the public should be reassured that robust privacy protections are in place.

To protect the privacy of Singaporeans, the TraceTogether code should remain open source and gather only data that is absolutely necessary for contact tracing. Third party privacy audits should be conducted regularly with results published.

Offer free vaccinations for Covid-19

The Covid-19 vaccine, when available and approved, should be administered for free to all Singapore residents, starting with the most vulnerable. Immunisation should be required for residents of all ages, where safe and medically recommended, so that herd immunity against the virus in Singapore can be quickly attained, with an added benefit of avoiding further costly lockdown measures.

Review Budget stimulus and payment modes

The government has unveiled an unprecedented four Budgets to deal with the economic shocks caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The large stimulus packages are a welcome relief for many Singaporeans and businesses. Nevertheless, the plethora of assistance packages — GST Vouchers, S&CC rebates, Temporary Relief Fund, SIRS, Workfare, Covid-19 Support Grant, Silver Support, cash, etc — can be confusing for many people. Many are unsure if they need to separately apply for them or if they will receive the support automatically.

Instead of spreading the support package over so many schemes, it would be better to channel the financial support primarily through a stored value account for each citizen. This way each citizen will be able to see the full amount of support they receive and use it to tide them over the difficult period, while injecting necessary stimulus into the economy.

There should also be a single portal across the whole of government, allowing every citizen and company to view the support they have received from government schemes, the schemes which they may be eligible for with direct links to application forms, as well as their available credits.

Plug gaps in support

The enhanced support packages were timely and useful. However, there are gaps in these measures which should be addressed as quickly as possible.

HDB public rent should be forgiven until all forms of lockdown restrictions are lifted, as rental flat residents are screened to be of low income. This would protect our society's most vulnerable members and stimulate the domestic economy, while having minimal fiscal impact.

The Self-Employed Person Income Relief Scheme should be made automatic for all self-employed adults below the age of 37.

Singaporeans who have CPF balances that exceeded their CPF Minimum Sum should also be allowed to withdraw a reasonable percentage of their excess CPF balances during times of crisis such as this.

Support local enterprises robustly

The take-up of government-backed credit schemes has been low. Many SMEs and micro-businesses face an urgent cash flow crisis. Two thirds of our workers are employed by SMEs.

For government loan schemes to provide emergency credit to SMEs during Covid, SMEs should be allowed to repay these loans when they return to profitability. There should be clear rules mandating that Financial Institutions offer lower interest rates to be offered for loans where the government takes on the bulk of the credit risk.

Review public communications and controls during pandemics

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen serious and regular government communications efforts. However, changes to control measures were made too frequently for most members of the public to meaningfully register, leading to confusion and “rule fatigue.” Moreover, rules were often announced but with exceptions announced a short while later.

Learning from this experience, every effort should be made to ensure that major rule changes should not happen on a daily basis. Exceptions to new rules should be announced at the same time as the rule.

THRIVING IN A POST-COVID WORLD

With the right measures in place, the Covid-19 pandemic in Singapore will eventually subside, although it is unlikely that the virus (and its mutations) will be eradicated. Singapore must prepare for life after this. We must look to the positive lessons and opportunities afforded by our experiences, and see that it has created room for new thinking about how we work and interact with each other.

Revise pandemic preparedness plans

After the crisis has subsided, an independent commission of inquiry should be convened to examine the lessons learned from the Covid-19 crisis and institutionalise changes to the current pandemic preparedness strategy, plan and protocols. The commission's proceedings and findings should be made public, and both experts and ordinary Singaporeans should be given an opportunity to provide input. The public should be allowed to comment on the revised pandemic preparedness plan before it is finalised.

Implementation of the revised pandemic plan should begin immediately, with an aggressive timeline for preparatory activities. This will help us to be better prepared for the next epidemic or pandemic.

Develop domestic manufacturing capabilities for critical items

Singapore currently has little domestic manufacturing capabilities for critical items needed to deal with a large-scale medical outbreak. These include face masks, ventilators, diagnostic test machines, testing reagents and other personal protective equipment. Like many countries, we are heavily dependent on imports. As we have seen, during a serious pandemic,

each country competes for limited amounts of critical items, and some will impose export restrictions to ensure sufficient supply for themselves. Singapore should set up more domestic production capabilities for these critical items to ensure we have adequate supply which is not subject to external disruption.

Should a similar crisis recur, suitable local companies could be given the blueprints and designs in order to ramp up production when requisitioned by the government. The government should be given powers to order manufacturers to divert R&D and production resources for national emergencies. The government's ability to enforce such powers should be tested from time to time, for emergency preparedness.

Proactively gather information overseas about disease outbreaks

During the early stages of an outbreak, timely and accurate information is vital for the authorities to make the correct decisions in response to the outbreak. A delay of just a few days in implementing passenger screening or border controls could result in hundreds of infected individuals entering and spreading the infection locally. Given the high volumes of international travel through Singapore, it might be too late to rely solely on official warnings, or advice from international organisations or foreign governments.

We need to proactively gather information about global disease outbreaks as they first occur. This would require a whole-of-government approach, leveraging our diplomatic, economic and other assets overseas to ensure our officials are able to take the right steps to mitigate the danger to our community. It could also involve sending early study missions to the city where the outbreak occurred to understand the situation first-hand from local health authorities, which would inform decision-making back home.

Improve the living conditions in foreign worker dormitories

The rapid spread of Covid-19 among the foreign worker dormitories has highlighted how their cramped and crowded living conditions can become breeding grounds for disease. These poor living conditions have been a longstanding issue raised repeatedly by NGOs over the years.

Greater political will is needed to improve their living conditions. We should do this not just to prevent the spread of infections, but also because we have a moral responsibility to these workers who have left their homes to work in Singapore and contribute to our economic growth.

Enforcement efforts must be stepped up to ensure that dormitory operators comply with the law. Those who have been found to have committed offenses that contributed to the spread of Covid-19 should be fined to the fullest extent of the law.

A dedicated statutory board should be created to proactively set and enforce standards for work and living conditions for all foreign workers on Work Permits.

We also call on all Singaporeans, in our everyday lives, to treat all foreign workers with the respect, courtesy and concern that all people deserve. This should be seen as not only a question of social justice but one of national security and public health. The Covid-19 crisis has shown that lapses on this front can harm Singaporeans.

Strengthen social safety nets for retrenched workers

The potentially large scale unemployment that the Covid-19 pandemic threatens to cause highlights the need for stronger social safety nets for workers who find themselves involuntarily unemployed. We elaborate on this in our proposal for a Redundancy Insurance scheme. Redundancy Insurance will not only ease the immediate financial pressure that retrenched workers face, but will also provide an automatic stabiliser to the economy — consumer spending will be sustained to help prevent the economy from spiralling downwards.

Build on digital gains made during the crisis

It has been said that Covid-19 has ironically been one of the biggest drivers of digital transformation in the workplace. Singapore should build on the gains made in the proliferation of working from home, home based learning, remote meetings and staggered working hours, as a way to improve productivity, work life balance and job satisfaction for our people.

Companies which put in place telecommuting policies during the time of the crisis should continue to allow employees to work from home and work flexibly wherever feasible. Positive shifts in our local work culture spurred by the crisis should not be allowed to go to waste.

Government programmes that support digitalisation among enterprises should encourage companies, particularly SMEs, to engage digitalisation beyond obvious work-streams such as e-invoicing and basic accounting automation. Support should be given to businesses to invest in disruptive, cutting edge areas such as blockchain and internet-of-things (IoT) technology, dark factories, distributed ledger technology, artificial intelligence and data analytics. The Covid-19 crisis should serve as a pivot for companies that were digital laggards to leapfrog and advance to the head of the digital queue.

Nurture a core of globally competitive local enterprises

The Covid-19 pandemic made many countries realise their vulnerability to global supply chain shocks. Many countries would want to pull more essential manufacturing and services provision back to their domestic economies or economic blocs, and indeed we already see a shift towards more localised supply chains where goods are manufactured closer to their end markets.

This underlines the urgent necessity to nurture a strong core of locally-rooted, globally-competitive Singaporean enterprises that can sustainably create jobs at home, even if multinational corporations were to scale back their investments in Singapore. The points contained in our manifesto on nurturing local enterprises are key to achieving this.

Changing our laws to enable Singapore to ease the growth of reserves in order to invest in Singaporean workers and companies should be seen as a necessary step. Accumulating huge reserves while keeping Singaporean workers and companies weak is no recipe for the future. Investing in building capabilities and resilience is the only way we can develop a thriving, strong economy that will need less draw-down on our reserves in times of difficulty.

Do our part as good global citizens

Singapore has always been an open, trade-dependent country. We will not be protected from disease pandemics if the rest of the world is not. Singapore should do its part in disease preparedness efforts globally. This includes collaborating with international organisations on vaccine and therapy development, sharing modelling data on disease spread and contributing aid to affected countries, not only for crisis handling but also for healthcare capacity-building.

CHAPTER 2:

ACHIEVING OUR DREAMS

We believe that hardworking Singaporeans must be equipped with the right tools and support to pursue their dreams, to strive for the best for themselves and their families.

Holistic, systemic changes are needed to our education and social policies to enable this and to prevent further divisions between the haves and have-nots in our society.

Education – from the early years to continuing education – is the cornerstone for giving students the means to better themselves and to improve social mobility.

Our social policies must support Singaporean families while caring for those who are struggling or left behind, and to help them get back on their feet.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR OUR FUTURE

Improve access to university places for Singaporeans

Universities should implement targeted programmes and mentorships to **widen access to students from all backgrounds**, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds and no family history of attending university. These programmes should commence at secondary school and include financial support to ensure that participants are not only admitted to universities, but stay and complete their degrees. Mentorships and holiday work placements should also be offered to participants, as they may not have the necessary resources or knowledge of how to obtain such placements.

This programme would also benefit universities and prospective employers by widening the pool of candidates from beyond their traditional recruitment grounds, resulting in a more diverse and vibrant tertiary and work environment.

Raise the targeted percentage of graduates per cohort to 50%

The percentage of each cohort to study at a university in Singapore has increased from 27% in 2012 to 35% in 2017, with a target of 40% in 2020. The Government should increase places for university admissions, aiming for at least 50% of each cohort to obtain a university degree.

Reduce form class sizes in schools to 20-25 students

In Singapore, the average class size for each primary and secondary school class is 29 and 34 students respectively, compared with an average of 21 and 24 in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. The government has acknowledged that with good teachers, small class sizes help students. The Gifted Education Programme and Integrated Programme classes already have significantly smaller class sizes.

The Workers' Party calls for **average form class sizes to be lowered to 20**. This should be rolled out progressively, with priority given to foundation subjects in primary schools and normal stream/G1 subjects in secondary schools. Academically weaker students should be the first to benefit from this change.

Ensure Equitable funding for schools

Popular schools usually charge higher 2nd-tier miscellaneous fees, enjoy greater economies of scale and have wealthy alumni who donate to fund better facilities and programmes. The student bodies of popular schools are also usually better able to afford programmes requiring significant co-payment. As a result, these schools offer more varied sports and enrichment programmes, attract bigger enrolments and generate more funding in a virtuous circle.

Less popular schools should receive further baseline funding on top of the current per capita funding. This will ensure that these schools are able to offer their students a wider range of programmes and choices. This would mitigate the current disparity in resources between schools and expose more students to programmes that require more resources.

Improve access to enrichment programmes for low-income children

Tuition at highly subsidised rates is currently provided by ethnic self-help groups. Student Care Centres also provide assistance with schoolwork. However not all low-income students use either platform.

The current approach to [state-supported enrichment programmes outside of the school system for weaker pupils should be centralised under the co-ordination of the Ministry of Education](#) to offer highly subsidised, high-quality coaching and teaching interventions for low-income and at-risk students.

All eligible students should be encouraged to sign up to such classes after school or on weekends.

More infant care centres

While the number of infant care centres has almost doubled since 2014, parents living in certain residential areas, such as Sengkang and Hougang, still face long waiting lists to place their children in centres close to their home.

The number of infant care centres built must directly reflect the population demographic of the district they are located in. Newer housing estates with young families should have more centres with the necessary resources and facilities to provide quality care for infants.

Extend fee and financial assistance to all preschools

The Kindergarten Fee Assistance Scheme (KiFAS) is currently only available for parents of children enrolled in kindergartens run by anchor operators and the Ministry of Education. This stifles competition with other operators that provide quality education but are not KiFAS-eligible, and limits parents' choices.

KiFAS must be extended to all preschools to give lower income families more choices in deciding which kindergarten works best for their children.

10 year through-train option for primary and secondary schools

We propose a **10 year through-train programme (10 YTS) from Primary 1 to Secondary 4** as an option for parents who wish their child to bypass the PSLE. The 10 YTS programme gives students 10 years to prepare for their first major examination at Secondary 4, allowing them to learn at a pace best-suited to them while developing other areas of interests. The 10 YTS will pair up existing primary and secondary schools and complement, not replace, the non-YTS tracks in these schools.

Introduce a SkillsFuture education loan

There should be a SkillsFuture education loan disbursing zero-interest loans from the state to support the cost of private Continuing Education and Training (CET) programmes and qualifications.

While there are various options under the SkillsFuture scheme for grants that support the cost of deep, specialised training in specific skills, these awards are limited and highly-competitive. Furthermore, existing education loans from banks are subject to credit checks and commercially-prevailing interest rates which may make them less accessible to applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds.

SkillsFuture loans should be readily available and would allow for non-competitive, more widespread access to CET funding. To nudge prospective students into high-potential transformative industries, the granting of such loans can be calibrated towards high-growth industries with a lack of Singaporean manpower.

Teach for Singapore

Students from low-income households often come from families with multiple problems requiring social worker interventions. These add to the challenges they face in striving to build strong foundations for future successful careers.

The Workers' Party repeats its call for a Teach for Singapore scheme, with a cadre of teachers trained in both educational and social work, who can provide academic guidance and holistic care to at-risk students. Such teachers would be better equipped to guide disadvantaged students in negotiating the obstacles they face in achieving their full potential in life.

SOCIAL POLICIES FOR SOLIDARITY

Uncage Our CPF

The **CPF Payout Eligibility Age and CPF Life eligibility age should be lowered to 60**. Elderly Singaporeans must be empowered to make an informed choice of when to start drawing down their hard-earned retirement savings.

Introduce Special Dividend from GIC investments for CPF members

As the Government Investment Corporation (GIC) indirectly invests CPF funds, CPF members must be given transparency on the nature and performance of their money. The Government should notify members on the 10-year moving average difference between the investment returns of GIC and the net interest payable on CPF member balances.

To boost retirement adequacy, **a third of this difference, where positive, should be returned as a special dividend and paid into CPF members' Special Accounts**.

Ensure Inclusivity for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)

PWDs must be given more support to live fully enabled lives. Anti-discrimination legislation should specifically address PWDs, with the civil service taking the lead in employing PWDs where possible.

The current Assistive Technology Fund administered by SG Enable should be made more flexible, with higher caps for disabilities requiring more expensive technology and for cases of disability diagnosed early in life. The government should intervene to ensure access to reasonably-priced van or bus transport services for VWOs supporting the PWD community.

National strategy to combat poverty

We reiterate our proposal to **establish social protection steps pegged at 30%, 50% and 80% of the annual median monthly household income per member**.

The Government should publish an annual state of social protection report to measure progress for poverty mitigation and social mobility measures. The report should track our

progress in empowering vulnerable groups to move up the social protection steps to become more self-reliant. It should also contain key performance indicators which the Government and the public can use to evaluate assistance programmes and to set future targets.

A leg up for children of disadvantaged and single parent families

We call for the [equalisation of state benefits and housing options for single parents](#). Children from single parent families continue to face discrimination and unequal state support in certain areas. Most single parents do not choose to be in their situation (and none of their children would have chosen it). Yet, current schemes perpetuate inequality by ultimately penalise the children of single parent families who are often in need of greater support.

Singapore's society has grown to be more competitive and unequal in terms of wealth and income. To level the playing field for children of low-income families, the Kidstart programme needs to be expanded beyond the current pilot areas. There should also be research on providing conditional cash payments of to low-income parents to [keep their children enrolled in early intervention programmes aimed at breaking the poverty cycle](#).

Equalise childcare subsidies for all women, including home-makers

Mothers engaged in paid employment for more than 56 hours a week are currently granted more childcare subsidies. This does not take into account the unpaid care or voluntary work that other mothers take on. Unpaid work also contributes to the economy and should not go unrecognised. Some mothers may also work part-time or be part of the gig economy, working less than 56 hours per month, leaving them ineligible for full childcare subsidies.

[Childcare subsidies should be equalised for all children, regardless of the employment status of their mothers.](#)

Enhance fertility support

Helping Singaporean women to conceive is not a cost but a positive investment and a way of supporting couples' aspirations to have children.

[There should be a not-for-profit National Fertility Centre \(NFC\) that consolidates fertility-related care under a single centre.](#) It would provide assisted conception procedures along with advice. A specialised centre will significantly reduce the delay in patients receiving

fertility treatment. The NFC should also explore the possibility of offering preservation of eggs and sperm to benefit married couples.

Medisave limits for fertility treatments under the Marriage and Parenthood Package should also be the same regardless of which attempt it relates to.

Fast-track Naturalisation for foreign spouses on LTVP+

Foreign spouses should be given priority for citizenship naturalisation if they apply after 5 years on the LTVP+, on the condition that they have been married to their current Singaporean spouse for 3 years or more and they have at least one child together. The evaluation criteria for such cases should be made transparent.

Given that over 20% of existing marriages are between a Singapore citizen and a foreign spouse, transnational marriages will continue to be an important contributor to family formation in Singapore. Fast-tracking parents of Singaporean children for citizenship would facilitate the formation of stable family units.

Reduce gambling opportunities

There are many legal gambling avenues in Singapore. The expansion of gaming space in the two casinos and the legalisation of online gambling for two outlets in 2016 encourages more Singaporeans to take up the habit, a potential gateway to addiction. The National Council on Problem Gambling reported in 2017 that 52% of Singaporeans and PRs aged 18 and above said that they had gambled in the past year, up from 44% in the 2014 survey.

The Workers' Party calls for a **freeze in the number of gambling outlets and reduced access to gambling opportunities**. There should be no new casino licences, and annual passes should be prohibited, with the cost of entry kept at \$150 for every 24 hours. We reiterate our call for a ban on all forms of online gambling, which can create easier access to gambling.

CHAPTER 3:

GOOD JOBS AND DYNAMIC WORKERS

Singapore needs to stay competitive against the backdrop of rapidly shifting demographic changes, while leveraging new technology to provide dignified jobs for the workforce. We must ensure that each worker or business owner has a stake in our economy and shares in the success of it.

Over-dependence on low-cost foreign labour is a short-term crutch which does not benefit the economy, enterprises and workers in the long run. Additionally, we must reject the idea of a “silver tsunami”, and instead embrace the opportunities that older, more experienced workers bring our nation.

A THRIVING ECONOMY

Form an EXIM Bank to finance SME internationalisation

Surveys show that access to financing by SMEs remains a significant concern. Singapore lacks the close relations between SMEs and banks seen in countries like Germany and Japan, or a vibrant IPO landscape as seen in the US.

We propose **the establishment of an export-import (EXIM) Bank**, as suggested by the Economic Strategies Committee in 2010. EXIM banks have contributed to the industrialisation of countries like Japan and South Korea and can be harnessed in our aim towards Industry 4.0. The EXIM Bank would be mandated to focus on providing credit for exports and promoting foreign direct investment for promising SMEs. The Bank's mandate can include a focus on financing for digitisation and Industry 4.0 projects by local firms.

Form a National Secretariat for Enterprise

A National Secretariat for Enterprise (NSE) should be established to groom a critical mass of local firms to become globally competitive in key sunrise industries. The inter-ministerial secretariat will coordinate programmes across all relevant agencies and periodically review

progress made towards targets. The NSE should develop metrics measuring job creation and multiplier effects on the SME sector for industries receiving government support. This will then be used for reviewing the return on investment.

Keep commercial and industrial rents manageable

Rent is a significant cost for local SMEs. Although the government has launched several new JTC Corporation (JTC) industrial hubs and low-rent incubator facilities for start-ups, the corporatisation of JTC assets in the past has reduced access to low-rent public sector industrial space. Pegging HDB rents to commercial rates also places a large burden on the micro-businesses and start-ups operating in our heartlands.

JTC should expand its market share for industrial space, and to continue offering low-rent options for SMEs alongside its private sector-run facilities. Each of these would offer a different price-value mix.

HDB should offer low-rent commercial spaces allocated by ballot, to stimulate micro-businesses and entrepreneurship in the heartlands.

To minimise rental surges seen in the last decade, government commercial and industrial land policy must ensure that the level of commercial and industrial rental growth should not outpace inflation.

Nurture Silver industries

As one of the most rapidly ageing societies in the world, there will be increased need for nursing homes, assisted living facilities, senior day-care/activity centres and home care. However, the adoption of technology amongst these service providers could be lagging behind countries like Japan, Korea, China and Thailand, where innovations like robotics and wearable technology have already made a tangible impact.

Our economic and ministerial agencies in charge of elder-care should **work with local enterprises and government-linked research centres to promote the use of productivity-enhancing technology amongst care service providers.**

Test-bedding and perfecting care innovations domestically will enable our local firms to export these innovations to overseas markets, helping to drive our economic engine.

Require interest on late payments from Government to Vendors

The annual report of the Auditor-General often lists cases of government agencies which have registered extremely long delays in paying the invoices of government contractors.

The government is a large customer of SMEs in Singapore. Unjustifiably late payments adversely affect the development of a thriving SME sector, and causes cash flow difficulties that affect the viability of SMEs and incomes of SME employees.

Interest should be payable when government agencies are late in paying their contractors without good reason. This would help ensure fair contract adherence practices and better support our SMEs.

A DYNAMIC WORKFORCE

Introduce a national minimum wage

There are over 100,000 Singaporeans who earn a take-home pay of less than \$1,300 per month while engaged in full-time work. This is below the wage of \$1,300 per month that an average four-person household in Singapore would need to spend each month on basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter, according to government data. This means a large number of Singaporean families have difficulty making ends meet, even though their breadwinners are working hard to provide for them.

The Workers' Party calls for **all working Singaporeans to receive a minimum take-home wage of \$1,300 per month for full-time work** and pro-rated for part-time work.

Abolish retirement age

We call for abolishing the retirement age and allowing Singaporeans to work for as long as they are able and willing to.

Anti-discrimination legislation and measures should also be deployed to prevent unfair dismissal due to age discrimination.

This change would enable employers to assess employees based on their abilities and contributions, and ensure that they adopt non-discriminatory employment practices.

Address the gender wage gap

A recent estimate calculated that women can earn over half a million dollars less than their male counterparts over a 40-year career. This not only affects women, but instead has trickle-down effects for the wider labour market and economy, as it reduces family income and perpetuates economic and social inequity.

Employers with 10 or more employees should be required to report to MOM the gender pay gap for the same job description. The data should be aggregated and the average gender pay gap published for each industry sector, including the civil service, with individual company data being anonymised.

This basic data would give us a better idea of the problem and set us on the road towards closing the gender wage gap. Companies should be given assistance to learn how to reduce the gender pay gap in their sector, as this will increase access to a wider talent pool, enhance the diversity of their workforce, and allow them to better attract and retain capable workers.

Make Careshield Life premiums gender-neutral

Careshield Life premiums should be gender-neutral as any differentiation accentuates gender inequality. Private insurers should be barred from offering products that levy differential premiums based on gender or race.

Recognise unpaid labour

Unpaid labour in our society is primarily provided by women and usually relates to tasks associated with the running of households and provision of care. While not included in traditional measurements of GDP, such labour is nonetheless crucial for a smooth and efficient economy. Yet those that undertake unpaid work earn less throughout their working life and end up being more vulnerable in their old age as they often have inadequate CPF balances.

Recognising unpaid labour (whether carried out by men or women) must be the first step in addressing the disadvantages faced by those that take on the bulk of unpaid labour for a household. There should be annual measures of the amount of unpaid work undertaken by Singaporeans, and this should be published as a supplement to national GDP data.

Only by recognising the contributions of unpaid workers can we start developing policies that guard against such workers ending up lacking resources and destitute in what should be their golden years.

Introduce Shared Parental Leave

There is a direct link between paid increased parental leave and a child's psychological well-being. Paid parental leave encourages closer parental bonds with children while having positive effects on the relationship between the parents. Shared parental leave supports fathers who want to partake in the joys of parenthood and allows them the flexibility to take on greater responsibilities in child-care to support their wives.

We propose a **shared parental leave scheme that entitles parents to 24 weeks of government-paid leave**, to be shared between mothers and fathers as they choose, but with a minimum of 12 weeks to be granted to the mother and 4 weeks to the father. This scheme would replace existing maternity and paternity leave entitlements.

Support Employer Workforce Re-Entry Programmes for mothers and informal caregivers

Employers should be encouraged to provide **paid re-entry programmes to make it easier for mothers or informal caregivers seeking to re-enter the workforce**. Such programmes should include mentorship, skills updating and offering a permanent position at its completion. Tax reliefs should be granted to employers who run successful re-entry programmes.

Participants would be given a chance to update their skills and realise their potential, without having to accept a lower paid or skilled position due to their having had to take time off work.

Introduce Redundancy insurance

Technological disruption and global events lead to higher rates of redundancies, with middle-aged to older workers being most affected, heightening the insecurity facing many workers. **The Workers' Party proposes a Redundancy Insurance Scheme** to ease financial pressure on workers who have been made redundant while complementing existing programmes for re-training and re-employment.

Under our proposed scheme, the average worker will pay approximately \$4 per month into an Employment Security Fund. Employers would be required to match workers contribution.

A retrenched worker would then receive a payout equivalent to 40% of their last drawn salary for up to six months. The payout will be capped at \$1,200 per month with a minimum payout of \$500 a month to benefit low-wage workers. Payouts after the first payout will be conditional on the worker actively seeking a new job or undergoing re-training.

Legislate against discrimination for gender, race and age

Currently, the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) provides guidelines and may restrict access to foreign worker permits for discriminatory employers. However, any discriminatory practice is still not an offence carrying penalties.

After years of TAFEP, Singapore's job market would benefit from the greater clarity and more stringent penalties behind minimum anti-discriminatory norms that anti-discrimination laws would create.

Anti-discrimination legislation must be formally instituted to prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of race, gender, age and against Singapore citizens. Anti-discrimination legislation provides clarity for employers to introduce internal processes to better protect their workers from discrimination. Such a law would also help employers to institute anti-discrimination measures to protect themselves from reputational and legal risk.

Under-employed workers

An increasing number of workers (including PMETs) find themselves earning less compared with what someone with their qualifications would have earned in the past. A 2017 study by the Ong Teng Cheong Labour Leadership Institute found an underemployment rate of 4.3%, higher than MOM's time-based under-employment rate of 3.3% as at June 2018. This is likely to continue increasing with the development of new and disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence, autonomous vehicles and robotics.

Drawing on work that has been done by multi-lateral organisations, **the Singapore government should develop a measure for under-employment by pay and qualifications**, so that we are able to track our progress in tackling what would likely be a huge, structural challenge in the future.

Tighten Employment Pass (EP) approvals

The number of EP-holders has increased by 1.2% annually from 2013 to 2018. To ensure employment is only granted to foreigners where there is a real lack of local manpower and

skills, employers should, in all cases, submit a detailed description of local recruitment efforts done, numbers of Singaporean applicants and reasons why Singapore candidates who were considered were deemed unsuitable for the position. MOM should at the same time step up its detection efforts to sieve out false declarations.

MOM should use this data to better support employers in hiring Singaporeans, and ultimately to curb access to EPs by employers with a track record of low rates of hiring of Singaporean applicants versus foreign applicants without convincing reasons.

Introduce Employment Pass credentials assessment

All Employment Pass and S Pass job applicants with university degrees and diplomas should be subject to mandatory educational credential assessments (ECAs), with costs to be borne by the applicant. ECAs would only be accepted from a panel of government-appointed established, independent consultants. The ECA report will be sent to the government, prospective employer and applicant.

Incentives for hiring Singaporeans

Employers with a track record of hiring more Singaporeans than required by the dependency ratios should be given economic benefits such as tax incentives, reduction in government charges or preferential access to state incentives. This recognises the challenges in maintaining a robust local workforce and would encourage employers to keep looking for ways to hire and retain more Singaporean workers.

CHAPTER 4:

A HOME FOR ALL

We must tackle the cost of living for hardworking families buffeted by high living costs and struggling to keep up in a never-ending rat race.

Adequate planning and investment needs to go into physical and community infrastructure to ensure that our homes are places we are proud of and feel a sense of belonging to and to ensure that our social and healthcare systems are robust and sustainable.

We should not lean too heavily on the family as the first line of defence or assume that we will continue to have access to cheap, imported labour. We need to plan and take action to solve the challenges facing us rather than kick the can down the road for future generations to deal with.

REDUCING THE COST OF LIVING

No to a GST hike

The Workers' Party opposes the government's plans to increase GST to 9%. This tax hike will be yet another burden on hardworking families who are already struggling with the high cost of living in Singapore. There are alternative sources of revenue that need to be more thoroughly considered before increasing the GST. The Government should also release its revenue and expenditure projections for the rest of the upcoming decade for the public to make a more informed decision on raising GST.

More generally, a deeper public discussion on alternative sources of revenue must be undertaken. For example, the revenue shortfall can be met by tapping no more than a fifth of the approximately \$15 billion per year in land sales that the government typically collects or by increasing the Net Investment Returns Contribution by up to 10%. These will not reduce the government's reserves, which will continue to grow, albeit at a slightly slower pace.

Control HDB Build-to-Order (BTO) prices

HDB BTO selling prices in non-mature estates should be pegged to household incomes.

Prices should be based on a 20-year mortgage, 10% down-payment, and monthly repayments of a maximum of 25% of the median monthly household income.

Discount should be offered to lower income applicants of 2-room and 3-room flats to achieve debt service ratios of 10% and 20% respectively.

A 20-year mortgage will let homeowners fully pay off the mortgages around the time they turn 50, a time when Singaporeans often face greater income insecurity and increased financial pressures such as parental care support, children's educational costs and their own healthcare needs.

We further note that land costs account for around 60% of BTO flat development costs and is a payment from one arm of the government (the HDB) to another (government reserves). Unlike most developed countries, the government owns most of the land in Singapore and does not incur net debts from acquiring it.

HDB should also give each buyer the breakdown of land sale costs, developmental costs and subsidies for them to better understand the price of their flats.

Make medicines more affordable

The high cost of medication contributes to the healthcare cost burden for Singaporeans. To compound this problem, manufacturers of drugs charge higher prices in Singapore compared with other countries in the region due to their global pricing policies.

A multi-pronged approach is required to tackle this problem.

All public and CHAS-affiliated private healthcare institutions should **channel their drug, medical equipment and material purchases through a central buying agency tasked to negotiate better prices with manufacturers** on the basis of bulk purchase and purchase guarantees based on demand forecasting. This will translate to more cost savings for patients. Healthcare providers should also be allowed to buy from alternative suppliers if they can obtain lower costs.

The Agency for Care Effectiveness should conduct a detailed comparative study of drug prices between Singapore and countries in the region. It should publish a weighted price index that measures factors such as strength of currency, distributor margins and the

number of lower-cost alternatives available, such as generic drugs. This will inform the public about where healthcare institutions have to focus their efforts in managing costs.

Aside from tracking the use of cheaper generic drugs as alternatives, the government should also step up efforts to promote the registration of generic drugs in the public healthcare system, as not all global generic drugs manufacturers register and import their drugs in Singapore.

Remove Medishield Life annual claim limits

MediShield Life is a national health insurance scheme that is intended to help Singaporeans cover large medical bills. However, some patients find that after factoring in deductibles, co-payment and annual claim limits, they are still faced with large and unmanageable medical bills after Medishield Life pay-outs. For example, cancer patients may incur huge bills within a year which are beyond the annual claim limit.

MediShield Life annual claim limits should be removed and replaced with a lifetime claim limit. Lifetime claim limits should also be raised for patients claiming for bills in B2-class and C-class wards in government restructured hospitals, where more stringent cost control measures are already in place. Access to funding above current claim limits should depend on means testing and wealth declarations.

The cost of this should be borne by the state to keep MediShield Life premiums affordable.

Lower the cost of Intermediate and Long-Term Care (ILTC)

ILTC includes residential services (community hospitals, nursing homes), centre-based services (day care, day hospices) and home-based services (home nursing care, home palliative care). While acute care in restructured hospitals is currently heavily subsidised, ILTC remains costly and inaccessible. For example, it costs between \$2,000 and \$3,600 a month to stay in a nursing home (before any subsidies). Subsidies are means tested and range from 80% (for patients with a household per capita monthly income of \$800 and below) to 0% (for monthly incomes above \$3,300), depending on the type of care.

Intermediate and Long-Term Care (ILTC) must be more heavily subsidised. Patients with a monthly household per capita income of below \$3,200 should receive subsidies of 65% to 80% for approved ILTC services. This will help relieve the out-of-pocket financial burden of social care for many families.

Widen the use of Medisave for those over 60

Many seniors suffer from chronic conditions which require extended care that can be very expensive. Most outpatient treatment is not covered by Medishield Life, and access to Medifund is only available for a limited number of patients. The use of Medisave is subject to annual withdrawal caps. As a result, outpatients often incur significantly more out-of-pocket spending over the long term compared with inpatient care.

To minimise out-of-pocket expenses for our seniors, patients above 60 should be allowed to use their Medisave for all medical expenses not already covered by Medishield Life, Medifund or other assistance schemes. Such usage should only be allowed at government polyclinics, public specialist outpatient clinics and CHAS clinics.

Strengthen our hawker centres and HDB shops

Hawker centres should be directly managed by the NEA to keep business costs low.

Socially-conscious enterprises and commercial entities should not be tasked with the management of hawker centres. Hawkers should also not be allowed to sublet their stalls. The NEA should set rent at a reasonable percentage of what private food court operators charge to ensure cost stability, consumer affordability as well as to encourage more Singaporeans to enter and sustain the hawker profession.

To keep our hawker centres alive, amenities such as hawker centres should be built ahead of demand in new estates. Hawkers should be charged lower rents prior to demand building up. This is fairer to pioneering batches of residents and hawkers in new towns. As hawker centres are a key feature of Singapore's unique culture and heritage, they should be built in all town centres.

Simultaneously, stall leases should be awarded on the basis of retail diversity, use of healthier ingredients, and proposed price of food.

Similarly, HDB should continue to build and directly manage shopping plazas for neighbourhood clusters with a diverse retail mix favouring small businesses and micro-enterprises. Low-rental schemes should also be made available for these tenants.

Revive convenience and coffee shops

HDB should allocate a portion of void deck space to provide for at least one coffee shop for every two precincts. Coffee shops and convenience shops are community spaces that allow

residents to meet their everyday needs and foster ties with their neighbours while also being an integral part of our heartland culture.

OUR SINGAPORE, OUR HOME

Introduce HDB reform to tackle lease decay

The HDB resale market has been affected by concerns over lease decay in the past few years. If HDB resale prices fall, the retirement adequacy of many Singaporeans may be affected, if they rely on selling their flats to release funds for their retirement needs.

A universal buy-back scheme should be offered to all HDB lessees to back-stop resale prices to a certain degree. The buy-back formula should be devised to be fair to the buyer and the state. Some of the acquired flats could then be rented out to Singaporeans at rates in between commercial and HDB public assistance rentals. This would provide more housing options for Singaporeans who do not wish to own a flat lease at certain points in their lives.

Recognising the need for orderly urban renewal, the government should also consider launching more SERS exercises and providing a SERS scheme which does not require a proxy relocation site, using instead BTO and balance flats for relocation.

Allow BTO flats for singles at 28

The age at which singles can apply for a 2-room BTO flat should be lowered from 35 to 28.

Our public housing policy should be delinked from the expectation that Singaporeans should get married before a particular age – 35 in this case.

Young Singaporeans are becoming financially independent earlier and are marrying later. The government should not deny young single Singaporeans an opportunity to own their own home. The rental option is currently not feasible for most younger singles aged between 28 to 35 as the cost of renting a 2-room HDB flat from the commercial rental market is very high relative to the median wage.

Remove ethnic quotas for HDB resales

The ethnic integration policy (EIP) was introduced in 1989 by the government to maintain a proportionate ratio of residents across various ethnic groups in HDB estates. However, the EIP has made it more difficult for minorities to sell their flats, resulting in many having to sell at a discounted prices. Between 2015 and 2017, there were 1,600 appeals for waivers, an increase from the 1,200 appeals between 2013 and 2015.

The **ethnic quotas governing citizens' home ownership of HDB flats should be abolished**. This would address the disadvantage faced by ethnic minority HDB flat resellers.

Abolishing the quotas will not cause racial disharmony amongst Singaporeans. After more than 50 years of nation-building, our society has evolved and achieved multi-racial integration that has gone beyond the need for mandating proportionally mixed neighbourhoods. Singaporeans should be therefore given the freedom to choose where their homes will be without taking into account race.

Boost retirement adequacy for unpaid workers

Full-time home-makers and caregivers often struggle with retirement adequacy. Many of them have insufficient savings and CPF balances, despite contributing a huge amount to our society by undertaking unpaid labour in the form of caregiving.

The government should relax rules on the transfer of CPF funds before the age of 55 (including Medisave), provided the Minimum Sum has been met, to allow transfers to older relatives in one's extended family.

Boost caregiver support

Caregivers carry a heavy burden in caring for loved ones. Many of them neglect their own physical, emotional and mental needs. Caregivers who also have jobs find it challenging to balance the demands of work and their dependants, sometimes with adverse effects on their job performance.

All **informal caregivers of elderly or disabled family members should be entitled to ask for flexible work arrangements** that are feasible for their line of work and fair to both employer and employee. Employers should provide reasons if the request cannot be met. Caregiver support networks and counselling services should also be readily available for care-givers who also work.

Industry Transformation Maps (ITMs) should be refined to encourage flexible work and work-life balance.

All full-time caregivers should be given the option to take a day off a week, where they can draw on a shared pool of suitably-qualified respite home care workers to step in during their day-off. Full government subsidies should be made available to those who meet the means-testing requirements.

Launch a Silver Living programmes for Assisted Living

By 2030, one in four Singaporeans will be aged over 65, and almost one in three will require some form of eldercare. Our future seniors will be a diverse group and have different financial abilities, needs and aspirations. Many of them will want to live outside an institutionalised care setting. To expand options for successful ageing, Singapore needs to provision of assisted living for seniors at different price points.

We propose a Silver Living Development Scheme to increase the number of affordable, privately-run Assisted Living Facilities to complement the assisted living HDB flats being rolled out. The Scheme will provide a substantial land grant to not-for-profit organisations in return for following a set of guidelines on care standards, along with operational and financial best practices. Such facilities should have good transport connectivity and offer shared office facilities to be made available to residents still engaged in white-collar work. On-site commercial facilities catering to all age groups should be available to encourage family visitation and inter-generational engagement with the public.

Innovative options to promote inter-generational solidarity and living should be created, including senior and child-care facilities within the same premises with shared activities. For example, seniors can volunteer as storytellers or tutors to children sharing the facilities. The option of students or young people living in senior homes is gaining in popularity in other fast-ageing societies and should be trialed.

Make public transport free for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)

Public transport on trains and buses should be made free for Singaporeans aged over 65 and all Singaporeans with disabilities. This should be funded from the Budget as well as utilising all available monies from the Public Transport Fund.

Though concessionary fares are now already available to senior citizens and people with disabilities (PWDs), free public transport would lower the financial burden on the rising number of seniors.

Seniors thinking of applying for casual or part-time jobs may be deterred by the cost of public transport to and from work. This measure could encourage more seniors and PWDs to take up work instead of remaining unemployed at home. Enhancing the employability of seniors and PWDs is a crucial priority for Singapore. It supports inclusiveness and active ageing and also raises our labour force participation rates.

Independently-measured service quality standards should be taken into consideration to determine the extent to which PTOs can raise fares, to encourage improvements to the commuter experience.

Do more to mitigate climate change

The average sea level around Singapore's coasts has risen steadily at a rate of between 1.2mm and 1.7mm per year, and is projected to increase by around 1m by 2100 under a moderate emissions pathway. Commitment to climate change mitigation is crucial and necessary.

We must increase our use of renewable energy sources. Natural gas, currently the main fuel used for power generation, is cleaner than coal or diesel, but is still a fossil fuel with a carbon footprint.

We propose **targeting a minimum of 10% of our energy to come from renewable sources by 2025**, which will put us on par with developed countries such as South Korea and Belgium. This should come from a combination of enhanced solar power deployment and energy-efficiency measures. New gas-fired power plants should not be built unless the demand cannot be met from renewable sources.

Government R&D funding should simultaneously be steered towards addressing the problems of intermittency and smooth integration of renewable sources into the power grid.

Curb plastics use

We call for the **introduction of a single-use plastic charge**, phased in over 5 years, to encourage a reduction in plastic waste and look for alternatives. The value of the charge would need to be sufficiently high to change behaviours but remain sensitive to the needs of lower socio-economic groups and PWDs.

A nationwide public education campaign to raise awareness of the effects of single-use plastics and other more sustainable alternatives. The carbon footprint for different products using sustainable, non-plastic materials should be published, together with full disclosure of the scientific methodology used to arrive at the numbers.

Styrofoam should also be banned where there are other eco-friendlier alternatives. The manufacture and sale of rinse-off cosmetic and personal care products containing micro-plastics should also be prohibited, following the lead of countries like the UK, where a similar ban was instituted in 2018. The ban should be phased in over a period of 5 years to give industry time to adapt.

CHAPTER 5:

A RESILIENT DEMOCRACY

ACCOUNTABLE POLITICAL AND GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONS

Singapore has come a long way since independence. The next stage of nation-building must result in a well-educated populace living in a resilient democracy with room for robust, respectful debate and diversity of views. We must also uphold accountability and keep key tenets and values of our society well protected.

Abolish Group Representative Constituencies (GRCs)

The GRC system should be abolished and be replaced by Single Member Constituencies.

Singaporeans have matured as a society to the point and there is now no evidence that Singaporeans vote solely along racial lines. Continuing the GRC system may, in fact, reinforce that which it seeks to counter, as the existence of GRCs may be taken to signal that ethnic minority candidates are unelectable on their own. With the abolition of GRCs and the removal of the Elections Department from the purview of the Prime Minister, the NCMP scheme can be discontinued as it would be unnecessary.

Safeguard the independence of national institutions

Close relatives and current or former party colleagues of political office holders should not be appointed to key positions in national institutions, including organs of state, national media companies and sovereign wealth funds. It is important to safeguard the independence of these institutions and improve public confidence in them. National institutions should not only be independent, but must also be seen to be independent.

The Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) should be overseen by a cross-partisan Parliamentary Committee.

The **Attorney-General's Chambers should be separated into two organisations** as suggested by former AG Walter Woon: a prosecution service which is operationally independent of the government, with its head appointed by the outgoing head in concert with the Chief Justice, and a government legal counsel reporting to the Cabinet.

The Elections Department of Singapore and Electoral Boundaries Review Committee should both be removed from the purview of the Prime Minister's Office and report to the Chief Justice and President respectively, and operate as fully independent bodies.

The People's Association (PA) has a standing policy of appointing the PAP branch chairman in each electoral division as their "grassroots advisers". This gives partisan politicians (even unelected ones) access to the funds, manpower and resources of the tax-payer funded PA and other government agencies, while elected opposition party MPs have to seek out alternative resources. The PA should be depoliticised by making the President the Chairman of the PA, enabling the PA to focus purely on their stated task of strengthening community relationships.

The **term of each Parliament should be fixed**, freed from the Prime Minister's unfettered discretion. The electoral boundaries report must also be published one year before the end of each fixed term of Parliament. This would make governance more predictable and transparent, ending the rampant, potentially disruptive speculation on the timing of elections. Early dissolution of Parliament should be allowed in special circumstances like a vote of no-confidence or assent of Parliament via a two-thirds majority.

Revert to a ceremonial presidency and safeguarding our reserves

The President is the Head of State, a unifying figure and symbol of the nation. Our past system of having Presidents chosen by Parliament resulted in Heads of State who were held in high esteem and greatly respected by the people. **The President should revert to being appointed by Parliament**, and serve as a Head of State who unites Singaporeans and represents the nation. Parliament should consider, amongst other qualifications, the multiracial character of our society while choosing each President.

The President should not be tasked to safeguard the past reserves and the integrity of the public service. Instead, a separate Senate should be established and directly elected by the people to exercise all the discretionary powers currently vested in the Elected President. Parliament should be able to overturn any Senate veto with a three-quarters majority.

Strengthen legislative oversight

Singaporeans want an accountable government. Parliamentary powers should be enhanced to take into account the role of a loyal opposition and strengthen its oversight over the Executive.

Standing select committees comprising elected MPs from across party lines should be set up for each Ministry to examine their spending, policies and administration. For sensitive agencies such as MINDEF and MHA, cross-partisan parliamentary committees should review spending at closed door hearings.

Parliament should establish its own cross-partisan public consultation select committee supported by a secretariat that will allow for public consultations to be held in a neutral, non-partisan manner.

Lower the voting age to 18

The **current voting age should be lowered to 18**. Enfranchising younger Singaporeans will empower them to meaningfully participate in public life earlier and lend their voice to public conversations and ensure that a longer-term view is reflected in national political choices. If young Singaporeans are asked to bear arms for their country at the age of 18, they should be entrusted to participate in the governance of the country they are defending by voting for their leaders. This change would also bring us in line with international norms.

Broadcast Parliamentary sittings live

There should be live, unedited broadcasts of parliamentary sittings and selected public hearings of parliamentary committees via internet streaming. The public should be able to view Parliamentary proceedings live without any time lag.

Form the office of an Ombudsman to investigate complaints against the public service

Citizens with grievances are currently deterred from seeking redress through legal action by considerations of cost and the difficulty of gathering evidence in the context of rules and laws such as the Official Secrets Act. This is made even more problematic with the recent approach of disclosing personal details of some citizens who have raised grievances.

There should be an **independent Office of the Ombudsman**. Any citizen who is aggrieved by the action of any public servant would be able to lodge a complaint with the Ombudsman to seek recourse. This would provide citizens with an alternative avenue to commencing legal action against the government, an option that few citizens would take.

The Ombudsman will be empowered to investigate complaints with the full cooperation of the civil service, at nominal cost to the citizen, and to practise a principle of anonymity for complaints made in good faith, similar to that required by the Singapore Exchange for whistleblowing policies for listed companies. The Ombudsman would be empowered to advise on corrective actions and recommend prosecutions.

This will enhance government accountability and create more options for citizens to seek redress without fear of reprisals or recriminations.

Declassifying our national archives

Documents in the National Archives that are declassified after 25 years from the date of record should be made freely accessible to all. This will ensure greater transparency and accountability, and lead to a better understanding of our history.

In the interests of national security, only material marked “Secret” would still be subject to requests and approval. An independent panel of experts should be set up to consider all requests for access and early declassification. All Cabinet papers should be automatically released after 40 years.

A Freedom of Information Act should be enacted to institutionalize Government accountability, with exceptions made on matters covering security and defence.

Enhance National Education in schools

To foster an active citizenry, National Education should be updated to focus on our Constitution and the workings of our Parliamentary democracy. Students should be taught the processes behind the formation of a government from Parliamentary elections, amending the constitution, the secrecy of ballots and the roles of MPs, Town Councils and national government agencies. The teaching of Singapore's political history should encourage the comparison of different interpretations and accounts.

Implement Media reform

The Newspapers and Printing Presses Act should be amended to abolish the government's power to require a class of management shares in newspaper companies. The Broadcasting Act should be amended to do the same for broadcast companies. The licensing regime should be opened up to allow mass media companies to be majority owned and managed by locals to encourage a free and competitive mass media sector.

An independent regulatory industry body should be created to investigate complaints against the media on grounds of ethics and journalistic integrity.

Make the Courts the primary arbiter of fake news

Deliberate online falsehoods are a threat to social harmony and fair elections world-wide. However, the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) enables every Minister to be the first arbiter of what can be publicly said as true. POFMA also does not check a government's ability to propagate fake news. These powers create the possibility for abuse by present and future governments to suppress inconvenient truths and entrench themselves in power.

The courts must be required to approve government POFMA directives on substantive grounds using a streamlined process with enhanced resources to ensure timely judicial decisions in time-sensitive cases.

Entrench an independent judiciary

Ministerial discretion should not be absolute and subject to either judicial review for lawfulness of process (not on merits) or review by the independent Office of the Ombudsman. Current exclusions from judicial review should be reviewed.

The retirement age of Supreme Court judges should be extended from 65 to 70 with no prospect for further extension. The present provisions for the appointment of fixed-term Judicial Commissioners and short-term Senior Judges should be removed. Extensions and short-term appointments weaken the protective wall that upholds judicial independence.

The Administration of Justice (Protection) Act, which seeks to protect Court proceedings from external influence, should be amended to scrap the government immunity clause, which unjustifiably allows the government to comment on Court proceedings in ways that members of the public cannot. The threshold for the offence of scandalising the judiciary should be restored to a "real risk" rather than merely a "risk", to avoid excessively harsh treatment of public discussions about judicial decisions.

We propose that trials for capital cases be conducted by a tribunal of two judges, whose decision to impose the death sentence must be unanimous. On appeal, the death sentence should be upheld only if upon a unanimous decision from the Court of Appeals bench.

Foster a robust criminal justice system

Arrested persons must be told their legal rights upon arrest, especially the constitutional right to counsel under Article 9 and the right against self-incrimination. An arrested person's constitutional right to consult legal counsel should be protected by allowing early access. **All interviews and the taking of statements by law enforcement should be video recorded** to ensure that statements have not been extracted by way of inducement, threat or promise.

There should be an Independent Police Complaints Commission to oversee complaints about the police and the Internal Security Department. Better oversight can prevent the overstepping of authority and excessive use of force.

Enhance Cyber-security

Independent cyber-security audits and “white hackers” should be regularly deployed to ensure that basic security flaws are prevented, like the absence of proper controls on deleting obsolete user accounts and installing security patches. Audit reports should be submitted to Parliament for review.

The Cyber Security Agency (CSA) should publish regular advisories on cyber-security for businesses and not-for-profits, utilising data from the latest incidents.

Such measures are necessary to enable Singapore to decisively address the recent spate of cyber-attacks and cyber-security lapses amongst government agencies.

Replace the ISA with an Anti-Terrorism law

The ISA should be abolished and replaced with an anti-terrorism law that enables swift detention without trial, but for a limited duration and with avenues to enable suspects to challenge their detention legally and obtain release if the law has been wrongfully applied.

In line with developed country norms, Singapore should try cases of espionage through the Courts, with modifications to protect secrets where necessary. If justice is seen to be done, that helps to undermine the propaganda of terrorists.

Promote sporting excellence

Young sporting talent should be identified and supported from a younger age, with both financial and coaching assistance provided by the government and sports associations. This will enable Singaporeans from a wider range of backgrounds to achieve world-class sporting excellence by easing the financial burden of the private coaching and education that is often required.

To keep political parties from using sports as a vehicle to promote their agenda, leaders of national sports associations should only be elected from amongst the sporting fraternity.

Politicians of all parties should not be allowed to hold any positions within sports associations.

A national sports museum should be established to promote our sports heritage. The National Heritage Board should give special consideration to our sporting heritage and honour our sporting heroes.

Create an independent body for the arts

We propose the creation of an independent body for the arts with representation from the arts community to oversee arts licensing and the award of arts grants. **Support for artistic projects should be given based on considerations of artistic merit, not based on the art work's implied attitude towards any political party or its interpretation of history.** Curbing state interference in arts policy and fostering independent community-led governance is the best way to nurture a flourishing arts industry.

A SECURE AND RESILIENT SINGAPORE

We support foreign and defence policies that place Singapore's national interests first while seeking to co-operate with as many other state and non-state actors as possible on the basis of mutual benefit.

Implement good global citizenship and public diplomacy

We support Singapore's participation in initiatives by the United Nations and other major international organisations, such as the World Health Organisation, UNESCO, the World Bank and International Labour Organization. **Whole-of-government efforts should be made to**

align Singapore to global best practice standards in policy areas such as vaccinations and workplace harassment.

Singapore should work with our companies and NGOs interested in Corporate Social Responsibility to step up public diplomacy efforts, particularly in ASEAN. Such efforts should focus on social impact and deepening cultural understanding of Singapore.

Communicating the positive regional role played by Singapore will win public support in the region for co-operation with Singapore.

Strengthen ASEAN

We support efforts to work with our neighbours to bolster ASEAN. A united and well-coordinated ASEAN can provide assistance to its members and enhance regional stability, including through the ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Political-Security Community.

We should seek multifaceted relations with our neighbours, as outlined in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint. This would include facilitating cultural exchanges, interaction amongst non-governmental organisations and civic groups, educational interactions, people-to-people contact, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) and development assistance.

These enhancements will strengthen ASEAN as an institution that can better serve Singaporean and regional interests.

Conclude South China Sea code of conduct

We support ASEAN's efforts to manage regional disputes and prevent the escalation of tensions. Singapore should work through ASEAN to finalise, as soon as possible, **a South China Sea Code of Conduct** that is consistent with prevailing international law and practice.

Any Code of Conduct should be mindful of power asymmetries and seek to limit arbitrary behaviour and pressure from states with greater capabilities.

Singapore should also work through ASEAN to realise arrangements to improve communication, manage differences, avoid accidents and prevent escalation.