

## Killing the Buzz: Curbing Public Drinking in Singapore

Weekend nights were party nights along the Singapore River. Youngsters would often congregate along pedestrian bridges and public sidewalks in Clarke Quay and Robertson Quay, swigging from beer cans and plastic cups of cheap spirits bought from nearby stores. After some rowdy pre-partying outdoors, they would then move into the surrounding clubs for a night of dancing without having to purchase much pricier drinks offered indoors. (See Exhibit 1)



**Exhibit 1:** Pedestrian Bridge at Robertson Quay, 2013. Author's photograph

The Singapore River was not the only venue of choice for public drinking. Neither were young partygoers the only group who congregated in public areas to drink. Foreign workers, mostly male, would gather in public fields or in the void decks of Housing Development Block (HDB) flats on weekends to unwind and drink. Popular gathering places included Little India, Geylang, and Golden Mile.

Not surprisingly, residents living near these drinking 'hotspots' were less than pleased with the state of affairs. They expressed dismay and resentment over the nuisances created by large groups of drinkers, such as vomiting, rowdiness, and sometimes even violence.

### **Should policy-makers clamp down on public drinking in these hotspots, and if so, how?**

This is a two-part case. Part One provides an overview of Singapore's drinking culture and the various policies surrounding alcohol consumption. It focuses on the problems policy-makers face related to public drinking and poses the question: what should be done to address these problems?

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Part Two of the case focuses on a new law on restricting public drinking that was passed in 2015. It details the rationale behind the restrictions, as well as reactions from affected groups. The second part ends by asking the reader to critically assess the likely impact of this new law.

## Part One: Public Drinking in Singapore

### Drinking Culture in Singapore

Singaporeans were infrequent drinkers. According to surveys by the Ministry of Health<sup>3</sup>, approximately 90% of Singapore residents drank fewer than three days a month. (Exhibit 2). Approximately 9% to 10% of respondents reported binge-drinking,<sup>4</sup> with younger Singaporeans from 18-29 years of age showing a greater propensity towards such behaviours. (Exhibit 3) This paled in comparison to drinking patterns elsewhere. A 2014 report by the World Health Organization showed that about 16% of drinkers worldwide engaged in binge drinking<sup>5</sup>, with Finland, Ireland and Austria hitting over well over 30%.<sup>6</sup>

**Exhibit 2: Alcohol consumption (%) of Singapore residents aged 18 to 69 years**

Alcohol Consumption	2010 Total (%) <sup>1</sup>	2004 Total (%) <sup>2</sup>
Non-drinker	54	49.2
Occasional drinker (<3 days a month)	35.9	40.6
Frequent drinker (1-4 days a week)	7.6	7.0
Regular drinker(> 4 days a week)	2.6	3.2

**Exhibit 3: Age-specific prevalence (%) of binge drinking, 2010 & 2004**

Age (years)	2010 Total (%) <sup>7</sup>	2004 Total (%) <sup>8</sup>
18-29	15.5	14.1
30-39	7.9	10.1
40-49	7.3	9.0
50-59	6.3	6.8
60-69	3.8	4.4
<b>18-69</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>9.6</b>

One reason for the relatively low levels of drinking in Singapore could be the high levels of taxes on alcohol imports, which in turn translated into higher prices. The 2013 ECA Cost of Living Survey pegged the cost of beer in Singapore as the highest of the six Asian cities surveyed (see Exhibit 4 below)<sup>9</sup>, while a 2012 study on alcohol affordability in 65 cities world-wide ranked Singapore a lowly 43<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ministry of Health, “Tables for National Health Survey 2010”  
[http://www.moh.gov.sg/content/dam/moh\\_web/Publications/Reports/2011/National%20Health%20Survey%202010%20Tables.xls](http://www.moh.gov.sg/content/dam/moh_web/Publications/Reports/2011/National%20Health%20Survey%202010%20Tables.xls);

<sup>2</sup>Ministry of Health, “National Health Survey 2004”,  
[https://www.moh.gov.sg/content/dam/moh\\_web/Publications/Reports/2005/1/NHS\\_2004%28Part1%29.pdf](https://www.moh.gov.sg/content/dam/moh_web/Publications/Reports/2005/1/NHS_2004%28Part1%29.pdf)  
 (cited Mar 18 2015)

<sup>3</sup> The 2004 National Health Survey was carried out on a random sample of 4,168 Singaporeans aged 18 to 74 years, while the 2010 National Health Survey involved 999 Singapore residents aged between 18 to 79 years.

<sup>4</sup> Binge drinking is defined by: 4 or more drinks per session for women, 5 or more for men.  
<http://www.nams.sg/resources/Documents/Problem%20Drinking%20Resource%20Booklet.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> For the WHO report, heavy episodic drinking (binge-drinking) is defined as the consumption of 60 grams or more of pure alcohol on one occasion, which translates into roughly more than six standard drinks. Source: Global status report on alcohol and health, 2014 ed. *World Health Organization*, pg. 4,  
[http://www.who.int/substance\\_abuse/publications/global\\_alcohol\\_report/msb\\_grs\\_2014\\_1.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/global_alcohol_report/msb_grs_2014_1.pdf?ua=1) (cited March 20 2015)

<sup>6</sup> Global status report on alcohol and health, 2014 ed. *World Health Organization*, Appendix 1,  
[http://www.who.int/substance\\_abuse/publications/global\\_alcohol\\_report/msb\\_grs\\_2014\\_3.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/global_alcohol_report/msb_grs_2014_3.pdf?ua=1) (cited March 20 2015)

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Health, “Tables for National Health Survey 2010”

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Health, “National Health Survey 2004”

<sup>9</sup> ECA International, “Beijing now second most expensive location in Asia for expatriate staff”, Dec 5 2013,  
<https://www.eca->

According to Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, Tharman Shanmugaratnam, alcohol taxes were kept high, “in line with our social objective of avoiding excessive consumption or indulgence in these areas.”<sup>11</sup>

**Exhibit 4: Prices of some sample items from ECA International's basket of goods and services commonly purchased by expatriates (in USD)**

LOCATION	Can of soft drink (50cl)	Beer at a bar (50cl)	Fresh milk (1L)	Bread (1kg)
Hong Kong	1.21	9.18	3.56	5.15
Tokyo	1.58	9.7	2.62	6.33
Beijing	1.2	9.28	4.17	6.76
Shanghai	0.83	10.34	4.35	6.58
Singapore	1.25	<b>13.47</b>	2.67	4.14
Taipei	0.97	8.41	2.81	4.97

Other than high taxes, Singapore had, for many years, relatively few restrictions on drinking. As of May 2015, the legal drinking age in Singapore was 18 years, and those under the legal drinking age were not allowed to purchase or consume alcohol in places selling alcohol<sup>12</sup>. Besides having a minimum drinking age, Singapore also had laws that made it an offence to be drunk in public to the extent of being incapacitated<sup>13</sup>, or for an intoxicated person to cause annoyance to others in public.<sup>14</sup>

### Public Drinking And Its Inconveniences

*“Walk behind Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel on a Friday or Saturday night. [...] Both banks of the Singapore River from the hotel to the beginning of Robertson Quay are packed with groups of young, semi-drunk yolo-ers, each louder than the next. Each circle has its own poison of choice – alcohol by the bottle (and mixers), bought a fraction of the price at one of two basement convenience stores at the Holiday Inn Hotel across the street. [...] As poor students, we couldn’t afford the drinks in Zouk so the riverside is the logical cheap-ass option that gets you high at a fraction of the cost.”*

Miranda Chan, Editor-in-chief, *Poached Mag*<sup>15</sup>

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[international.com/news/press\\_releases/7930/Beijing\\_now\\_second\\_most\\_expensive\\_location\\_in\\_Asia\\_for\\_expatriate\\_staff#.VQJjOCnYHN5](http://international.com/news/press_releases/7930/Beijing_now_second_most_expensive_location_in_Asia_for_expatriate_staff#.VQJjOCnYHN5) (cited March 19, 2015)

<sup>10</sup> Ming-Yue Kan & Maggie Lau, “Comparing alcohol affordability in 65 cities worldwide”, *Drug and Alcohol Review* Jan 2013, 32, 19-26. Annex A

<sup>11</sup> Janice Heng, “Rise in sin taxes may just be the start” *The Straits Times*, Mar 7 2014, <http://www.singapolitics.sg/views/rise-sin-taxes-may-just-be-start> (cited Apr 20 2015)

<sup>12</sup> AGC, Customs (Liquors Licensing) Regulations, Section 25, <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p;orderBy=date-rev;loadTime;page=0;query=Id%3Aada0d37d-f937-4c14-9755-617f77b36745;rec=0#pr25-he->

<sup>13</sup> Section 18 of the Miscellaneous Offences (Public Order and Nuisance) Act states “It is any offence for someone to be drunk and incapable of taking care of himself in a public place. Any person who is found drunk and incapable of taking care of himself, in any public road or in any public place or place of public amusement or resort, or in the immediate vicinity of any court or of any public office or police station or place of worship, shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding \$1,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one month and, in the case of a second or subsequent conviction, to a fine not exceeding \$2,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 3 months.”

<sup>14</sup> Section 510 of Penal Code states “it is an offence for an intoxicated person to appear in a public place and cause annoyance to any person. Whoever, in a state of intoxication, appears in any public place, or in any place which it is a trespass in him to enter, and there conducts himself in such a manner as to cause annoyance to any person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 6 months, or with fine which may extend to \$1,000, or with both.”

<sup>15</sup> Miranda Chan, “[All Things Local] The rite of passage for an 18-year-old Singaporean”, *Poached Mag*, Aug 7 2014, <http://poachedmag.com/2014/08/07/all-things-local-the-rite-of-passage-for-an-18-year-old-singaporean/> (cited March 15 2015)

*Beer cans are seen as must-have items, and the workers pick these up at the ubiquitous liquor stores in [Little India]. Shop owners say the beer of choice for Indian national workers is Kingfisher, and they can easily consume three to four 500ml cans costing \$3.50 each. They carry food and drinks to open fields and relax in groups of about four or five. Bangladeshi workers prefer Tiger and Heineken beer costing around \$2 a can, and drink in discreet alleys to avoid upsetting their more conservative friends.*

Amelia Tan And Maryam Mokhtar, *The Straits Times*<sup>16</sup>

*These are people who work very hard. If you work very hard, don't you want to have a beer? Maybe you sit at a bar, have one or two beers. They're doing the same thing.*

Gopal Nan, Owner of liquor store in Little India<sup>17</sup>

Despite such laws, high alcohol prices and relatively low levels of alcohol consumption among the general population, Singapore still faced problems created by public drinking in specific locations.

#### (A) Noise and Other Nuisances

An area where youths often congregated to drink was **Singapore River**, particularly around Clarke Quay and Robertson Quay where several popular clubs—Zouk, Home Club and Attica, were located. Before heading into these clubs, young people would first ‘pre-party’ in public areas with alcohol bought from nearby stores, to avoid having to purchase more expensive drinks sold in the clubs or nearby bars. As a result, residents living in surrounding, high-end condominiums often had to contend with a variety of nuisances generated by drunken young partygoers such as noise, litter and vomit.<sup>18</sup>

These drunken shenanigans also affected tourists staying in the area. In a 2011 news report, the general manager of Riverview Hotel Andreas Koch remarked "No matter how peacefully the young people are sitting there, my guests still feel intimidated by the large groups. [...] Sometimes, the bridges are so crowded that my guests have hardly any space to cross. When they go back to their rooms, they can still hear and see all this. [...] Singapore is supposed to be a clean city. But at night and the morning after, what these tourists see is not in line with the country's overall image and reputation".<sup>19</sup>

Speaking on behalf of her harassed constituents, Member of Parliament for Robertson Quay Ms. Indranee Rajah lamented, "the problem of drunkenness with the consequential nuisances arises from youth buying alcohol from convenience stores and other outlets, then bringing it to Robertson Quay to party." She advocated for the bridges and pedestrian walkways around

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<sup>16</sup> Amelia Tan And Maryam Mokhtar, "Little India riot: Foreign workers gather to relax with food and alcohol" *The Straits Times*, Dec 12 2013, <http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/little-india-riot-foreign-workers-gather-relax-food-and-alcohol?page=0%2C1> (cited March 20, 2015)

<sup>17</sup> Lim Yan Liang et al, "The new face of Little India two months after riot" *The Straits Times*, Feb 2 2014, <http://www.straitstimes.com/the-big-story/little-india-riot-two-months/story/the-new-face-little-india-two-months-after-riot-201#sthash.Eh3XXeMK.dpuf> (March 20 2015)

<sup>18</sup> Denis Edward 'High' life shattered by drunk party goers, *The New Paper*, Oct 26 2011, <http://news.asiaone.com/print/News/AsiaOne%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20111025-306987.html> (cited March 30 2015)

<sup>19</sup> Bryna Sim, "MP wants 'no-alcohol zone'", *The New Paper*, Sept 26 2011, <http://news.asiaone.com/print/News/AsiaOne%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20110925-301406.html> (cited April 1 2015)

Robertson Quay to be declared as non-alcohol zones, as “the only long-term and effective solution to the Robertson Quay problem”.<sup>20</sup>

**Little India**, a busy historic district popular with locals, tourists, as well as foreign workers, was another popular public drinking spot. On several occasions and on different forums, MP for the area Denise Phua highlighted the problems created by foreign workers who often congregated there on their off-days. In a 2014 interview with the Straits Times, she described how “[some workers] litter, some get drunk and urinate in public places. Some take over common spaces like the playground, [exercise] equipment area for elderly and the void decks. That’s been a source of frustration and irritation.” She also shared that the majority of affected Little India residents supported alcohol restrictions in public spaces.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, residents of **Teban Gardens**, a primarily residential district in the western part of Singapore, complained about foreign workers drinking at the void decks of HDB blocks, footpaths, car parks, staircases and neighbourhood parks, especially during weekends and public holidays. According to Teban Gardens’ MP Foo Mee Har, “[e]xcessive consumption of alcohol has been consistently linked to noise, littering, vomiting, urination and sometimes even fights, in the neighbourhood. There have been reports of foreign workers exposing themselves after one too many drinks. The situation has improved over the last 18 months after we had carried out some local initiatives, but it is difficult to solve the problem completely under the current laws [...] in this context, I urge the Government to expedite the review of policies on alcohol consumption”<sup>22</sup>

### (B) Threat of Violence

Heavy drinking—both in public areas as well as in bars, clubs and other licensed venues—had also been associated with incidents of violence. For instance, a 2014 news report estimated that approximately 170 fights or violent acts would break out in the Clarke Quay area each year, most of which were alcohol-related.<sup>23</sup> Local newspapers also provided anecdotal reports of alcohol-related fights breaking out in Little India<sup>24</sup> as well as Geylang—Singapore’s red-light district.<sup>25</sup> Fights in foreign worker dorms were also attributed to the presence of alcohol.<sup>26</sup>

In December 2013, a riot broke out in Little India, involving about 400 foreign workers, after a worker was run over by a private bus. The riot, which saw 49 police officers injured, 30 vehicles

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<sup>20</sup> Zul Othman, “Clarke Quay operators: Shorter liquor hours won't work”, *The New Paper*, Jul 25 2011, <http://news.asiaone.com/news/soshiok/clarke-quay-operators-shorter-liquor-hours-wont-work?page=0%2C4> (cited Mar 15 2015)

<sup>21</sup> Rachel Chang, “Denise Phua: 'Put ourselves in Little India residents' shoes”, *The Straits Times*, Mar 11 2014, <http://www.singapolitics.sg/supperclub/denise-phua-put-ourselves-little-india-residents-shoes> (cited March 30, 2015)

<sup>22</sup> Singapore Parliament, “Public Order (Additional Temporary Measures) Bill, Feb 18 2014, [http://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/topic.jsp?currentTopicID=00005663-WA&currentPubID=00005637-WA&topicKey=00005637-WA.00005663-WA\\_3%2Bid-e7eb49d2-e7e0-4d84-901f-923727c3ea0a%2B](http://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/topic.jsp?currentTopicID=00005663-WA&currentPubID=00005637-WA&topicKey=00005637-WA.00005663-WA_3%2Bid-e7eb49d2-e7e0-4d84-901f-923727c3ea0a%2B) (Apr 6 2015)

<sup>23</sup> Zul Othman, “They club, then they fight”, *The New Paper*, Mar 14 2012, <http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120312-332987.html#sthash.jikUIWbW.dpuf> (cited Mar 15 2015)

<sup>24</sup> Amelia Tan And Maryam Mokhtar, “Little India riot: Foreign workers gather to relax with food and alcohol” *The Straits Times*, Dec 12, 2013, <http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/little-india-riot-foreign-workers-gather-relax-food-and-alcohol?page=0%2C0> (cited Mar 30 2015)

<sup>25</sup> Tan Weizhen and Xue Jianyue, “Geylang residents welcome increased police presence” *The Straits Times*, Dec 12 2013, <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/geylang-residents-welcome-increased-police-presence> (cited Mar 30 2015)

<sup>26</sup> “Second man in Kaki Bukit dormitory fracas gets a week’s jail”, *Today*, April 26 2014, <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/second-man-kaki-bukit-dormitory-fracas-gets-weeks-jail>

damaged and hundreds of suspects were rounded up after the incident<sup>27</sup>, was highlighted as “the worst public order disturbance in Singapore in more than four decades” by Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean.<sup>28</sup>

Factors that policy-makers pinpointed as key contributors to the riot were the large congregations of foreign workers, easy access to and widespread public consumption of alcohol, as well as congested traffic conditions in Little India on the weekends.<sup>29</sup>

### **Efforts to reduce problems associated with public drinking in Singapore**

In response to these problems, authorities rolled out measures to restrict public drinking in targeted areas.

#### (A) Measures in Little India

Immediately after the 2013 Little India Riot, the government swiftly implemented a series of measures, which included increased security patrols, changes to transport and traffic arrangements, and perhaps most controversially, restrictions on the sale and consumption of alcohol in Little India. These included bans on alcohol consumption in public areas on weekends, public holidays and the eve of public holidays. Liquor and convenience stores in the zone were also disallowed from selling alcohol between 6am to 8pm on these days.<sup>30</sup>

A ‘temporary’<sup>31</sup> Bill was further passed in Parliament in February 2014, and came into force April that year. Together with other security measures, this Bill made it an offence to consume alcohol in any public place within a defined special zone—which in this instance covered Little India—even *within* licensed liquor establishments. It was also an offence to sell or supply alcohol on any premises within the special zone. At the same time, a special permit regime was set up as part of the Act to allow select persons (e.g. residents, transient visitors) or establishments (e.g. restaurants, hotels, pubs etc.) to continue selling alcohol<sup>32</sup>, subject to possible restrictions on trading hours, types of alcohol and so on<sup>33</sup>. In practice, authorities continued with the previously imposed restrictions on alcohol consumption and sale on weekends, public holidays and eves of public holidays<sup>34</sup>.

The penalty for unlawful consumption of alcohol in a public place within the special zone was a fine of up to \$1000, while the penalty for unlawful sale or supply of alcohol within the special zone was a fine capped at \$5000. Higher penalties were prescribed for repeat offenders. If establishments were found to have supplied or sold liquor in contravention of these restrictions,

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<sup>27</sup> Lim Yan Liang et al

<sup>28</sup> Parliament of Singapore, “Government’s response to the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the 8 Dec 2013 Little India Riot—Security-related issues”, July 7 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Parliament of Singapore, “Public Order (Additional Temporary Measures) Bill,

<sup>30</sup> Walter Sim, “Alcohol consumption in public areas of Little India remains banned on weekends” *The Straits Times*, Dec 18 2013, <http://www.straitstimes.com/the-big-story/little-india-riot/story/alcohol-consumption-public-areas-little-india-remains-banned-w> (cited Mar 31 2015)

<sup>31</sup> The Bill was described as temporary because it was slated to be valid for a period of 12 months. The Bill came into effect on April 1 2014, and would expire 31 March 2015. Source: MHA, “Public Order (Additional Temporary Measures) Act to take effect from 1 April 2014” [http://www.mha.gov.sg/news\\_details.aspx?nid=MzE1Mw%3D%3D-n9X92UEcjsx%3D](http://www.mha.gov.sg/news_details.aspx?nid=MzE1Mw%3D%3D-n9X92UEcjsx%3D) (cited Mar 31 2015)

<sup>32</sup> Parliament of Singapore, “Public Order (Additional Temporary Measures) Bill”, Feb 18 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Republic Of Singapore Government Gazette Acts Supplement, Public Order (Additional Temporary Measures) Act 2014,

[Http://Statutes.Agc.Gov.Sg/Aol/Search/Display/Printview.W3p;Page=0;Query=Compid%3abd244260-Fcbf-4fa7-918c-A63053238ad0;Rec=0#Pr3-He-](http://Statutes.Agc.Gov.Sg/Aol/Search/Display/Printview.W3p;Page=0;Query=Compid%3abd244260-Fcbf-4fa7-918c-A63053238ad0;Rec=0#Pr3-He-)

<sup>34</sup> “Public Order (Additional Temporary Measures) Act to come into force April 1” *Channel NewsAsia*, 31 Mar 2014, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/specialreports/parliament/news/public-order-additional/1054456.html> (cited Apr 22 2015)

they could have their licences cancelled or suspended. Furthermore, no new liquor licenses or extensions of trading hours for existing licences were to be granted within the special zone.<sup>35</sup>

In parallel with these actions, a Committee of Inquiry (COI) was set up to examine the causes of the riot. After a six-month study, the COI concluded that alcohol was “a major contributory factor” leading to the escalation of violence that night.<sup>36</sup> The COI thus recommended measures to enforce against public drunkenness and set in place alcohol restrictions in hotspots where large crowds typically indulged in heavy drinking, and where a triggering incident could spark public disorder.<sup>37</sup> The government accepted all the COI’s recommendations, and committed to the introduction of necessary, permanent legislation before the temporary Bill passed in February 2014 expired<sup>38</sup>.

The preemptive moves to curb alcohol sale and consumption in Little India were met with mixed reactions. A number of Members of Parliament raised concerns that these curbs mainly targeted migrant workers from South Asia, and thus could in turn unfairly perpetuate a negative stereotype of them, and prove detrimental to social cohesion. During the debate on the temporary Bill, Nominated MP (NMP) Eugene Tan argued that the targeted measures had the potential of ‘erecting social boundaries between Singaporeans and the South Asian migrant workers, and perhaps migrant workers in general’ and further cautioned that the temporary Bill could “create the perception of immigrant criminality tendencies”, and “stoke the fear that migration threatens our wellbeing”. Pritam Singh, from the opposition Workers’ Party, made a similar point, highlighting that it was “practically inevitable that South Asians will be subject to these powers more than any community [...] Could there be unintended consequences that encourage racial profiling in Singapore and is this a healthy law enforcement development in the context of a multi-racial society?” NMP Janice Koh noted “the targeted approach of curbing alcohol in Little India as a response to the riot [...] runs the risk of racially stereotyping and profiling people of South Asian descent and migrant workers in particular, as being prone to public disorder when they drink. This is potentially damaging to building good inter-racial and community relations between our South Asian migrant workers and Singaporeans as well as undermines the respect and dignity we should accord our guest workers”<sup>39</sup>

For the reasons given above, both Eugene Tan and Pritam Singh called for changes in legislation to tighten alcohol controls more generally throughout the island instead of just Little India. Other MPs, for a different set of reasons, echoed the call for wider application of alcohol curbs. MP Lam Pin Min suggested that foreigner workers would simply move away from Little India because of the temporary measures and congregate elsewhere. He observed that there were other areas where foreigner workers congregated in large numbers, such as Golden Mile and Peninsula Plaza. “While these areas have remained relatively peaceful, if alcohol consumptions holds such an impact, then should we not be concerned about these areas where foreign workers congregate? [...] I would like to urge the Government to take the bold step and go further and seriously consider banning the consumption of alcohol in public places, not just in Little India, but island-wide.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Parliament of Singapore, “Public Order (Additional Temporary Measures) Bill”, Feb 18 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Lim Yan Liang, “Little India Riot: Violence sparked by accident, alcohol ‘major factor’, says COI” *The Straits Times*, Jun 30 2014, <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/singapore/courts-crime/story/little-india-riot-alcohol-was-major-contributing-factor-led-violen>

<sup>37</sup> Parliament of Singapore, “Government’s response to the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the 8 Dec 2013 Little India Riot—Security-related issues”, July 7 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Nur Asyiqin Mohamad Salleh, “Little India Riot: Government accepts all 8 recommendations from the COI, *The Straits Times*, Jul 7 2014

<sup>39</sup> Parliament of Singapore, “Public Order (Additional Temporary Measures) Bill, Feb 18 2014,

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Other commentators and business owners in Little India also voiced concern that banning the sale and consumption of alcohol would negatively affect businesses in the area<sup>41</sup>, and reduce the overall vibrancy of the district<sup>42</sup>. In the months during the ban, some merchants responded by subletting part of their shop space, stocking less alcohol or entering into a different line of business altogether.<sup>43</sup>

## (B) Efforts along Singapore River

Milder alcohol restrictions had previously been tested out in the Singapore River area, to tackle the problems of drunken partygoers. In 2013, the police shortened liquor licensing hours for bars and nightclubs stretching from River Valley Road to Clarke Quay's Read Bridge in response to complaints of drunken behaviour there. Bars, dance clubs and convenience stores there were required to stop serving alcohol after 3am on Sundays and weekdays, and after 4am on Saturdays and the eve of public holidays, instead of as late as 6am before.

Bar and night club operators appealed against this restriction on alcohol sales, arguing that it compromised the area's reputation as a top nightlife destination in Asia, and would induce their customers to head elsewhere to party.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, they countered that the drunken culprits were not necessarily their customers but were teenagers buying cheap alcohol from nearby convenience stores.<sup>45</sup> They thus petitioned for authorities to target this specific group instead by banning the sale of alcohol in convenience stores within a one kilometre radius of Clarke Quay, and designating popular gathering spots in the area as a 'no-alcohol' zone.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the operators' efforts, the restrictions were implemented. In the ensuing years, some businesses struggled to stay afloat. In March 2015, Lifebrandz, a lifestyle and entertainment group, shut down five of its F&B and nightclub outlets in Clarke Quay, citing challenges in the operating environment such as stiff competition, lower spend by patrons and restricted liquor licensing hours.<sup>47</sup> However, other nightclubs like Zouk continued seemingly unaffected.

## **Curbs against public drinking elsewhere**

While the curbs on alcohol consumption introduced in Little India in the aftermath of the riot were unprecedented in Singapore, curbs on public drinking elsewhere in the world were already well-established.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Rachel Au Yong, "Little India riot: Shops worry about impact of liquor" *The Straits Times*, Dec 13 2013, <http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/little-india-riot-shops-worry-about-impact-liquor-ban> (cited April 6 2015)

<sup>42</sup> Kirsten Han, "Comment: How will six-month alcohol ban affect Little India?" *Yahoo! News Singapore*, Dec 20 2013, <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/blogs/singaporescene/alcohol-ban-place-little-india-six-months-point-040453420.html> (cited April 6, 2015)

<sup>43</sup> Janice Heng, "Alcohol sales plunge as new curbs kick in", *The Straits Times*, April 4 2015, <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/singapore/more-singapore-stories/story/alcohol-sales-plunge-new-curbs-kick-20150404#sthash.Nzi0jgIt.dpuf> (cited April 14 2015)

<sup>44</sup> Melissa Kok and Eunice Quek, "All Quay-ed up over dining and liquor sales restrictions", *The Straits Times*, Jul 30 2013, <http://www.soshok.com/print/content/all-quay-ed-over-dining-and-liquor-sales-restrictions> (cited April 6 2015)

<sup>45</sup> Melissa Kok, "Shorter Clarke Quay booze hours", *The Straits Times*, Jul 20 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Melissa Kok, "Petition against 3am liquor deadline", *The Straits Times*, Sep 16 2013.

<sup>47</sup> Melissa Kok, "Publicly-listed group Lifebrandz confirms it will be shutting Clarke Quay outlets" *The Straits Time*, Mar 13 2015, <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/singapore/more-singapore-stories/story/public-listed-group-lifebrandz-confirms-it-will-be-shutt> (cited April 20 2015)

<sup>48</sup> "Liquor Control Bill: How other countries and cities in Asia tackle drinking", *The Straits Times*, Jan 22 2015, <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/singapore/more-singapore-stories/story/liquor-control-bill-how-other-places-tackle-drinking-201> (cited April 21, 2015)



One commonly employed curb involved designating **zones or areas** as either ‘**alcohol-free**’ or ‘**alcohol restricted**’, where the public consumption of alcohol was restricted or banned outright. These restrictions could cover car parks, beaches, public parks, shopping centres, or larger defined areas like a city’s Central Business District. Such prohibitions could also be confined to certain events or even times of day.

For example, in Auckland, New Zealand, drinking of alcohol was prohibited in a number of streets and parks<sup>49</sup>. In some places, such as in the Auckland CBD, the controls were in place 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In others they were only in force only at night-time, during daylight savings or in conjunction with major events.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly in Australia, several cities implemented bans on consumption of alcohol in select public places. For instance, in Melbourne’s Central Business District, consumption of alcohol was banned in public spaces. In Perth, a similar ban covered areas such as the streets, parks and beaches and those caught flouting the law face a AUS\$200 fine.<sup>51</sup>

In Britain, its Police and Criminal Justice Act empowered local authorities to designate places where public drinking would be restricted, through Designated Public Place Orders (DPPO). In these zones, police officers could require a person to stop drinking and confiscate his or her alcohol, and it would be an offence to refuse, punishable by a maximum UK£500 fine.<sup>52</sup> By July 2012, 824 DPPOs had been issued nationally.<sup>53</sup>

Stricter measures included limiting the **carriage of alcohol**, by type and quantity of liquor carried<sup>54</sup>. In Queensland, Australia, the police had the power to stop and search vehicles and persons entering restricted areas, as well as enter houses without warrants if they suspect alcohol possession within the premises. If the imposed limits were breached, the police could confiscate alcohol found, and further penalties of jail or fines could be imposed.<sup>55</sup>

A community may be also be designated as a **dry community**, where the entire community was prohibited from drinking, carrying alcohol or being intoxicated. There were a number of dry communities in the United States. For instance, in Alaska as of January 2015, 33 communities<sup>56</sup> completely banned the sale, importation and possession of alcohol, with an additional 42 prohibiting sale and importation.<sup>57</sup> In Mississippi, almost half its counties were dry, with varying

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<sup>49</sup> Auckland Council, “Alcohol Bans”,

<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/licencesregulations/alcohol/drinkresponsibly/Pages/alcoholbans.aspx> (cited Apr 8 2015)

<sup>50</sup> Auckland Council, “Liquor Ban areas in operation”,

<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/licencesregulations/Bylaws/existingbylaws/aucklandcitycouncilbylaw/ Documents/accliquorbanareas.pdf> (cited Mar 31 2015)

<sup>51</sup> Sujin Thomas, “Singapore should rethink public drinking rules”, *The Straits Times*, Dec 15 2013,

<http://www.asianewsnet.net/Singapore-should-rethink-public-drinking-rules-55000.html> (cited Mar 31 2015)

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Institute of Alcohol Studies, “Policies to reduce crime and social order”, <http://www.ias.org.uk/Alcohol-knowledge-centre/Crime-and-social-impacts/Factsheets/Policies-to-reduce-crime-and-social-disorder.aspx>

<sup>54</sup> Michael Webb, Paul Mariott-Lloyd, Marty Grenfell, “Banning the bottle: Liquor Bans in New Zealand”, alcohol.org.nz, 2004, 3rd Australasian Drug Strategy Conference, Alice Springs, May. <http://www.alcohol.org.nz/sites/default/files/useruploads/ActsImagePdf/banningbottleliquorbans.pdf> (cited May 1 2015)

<sup>55</sup> Queensland Government, “Travelling in alcohol restricted areas,” 24 Nov 2014,

<https://www.qld.gov.au/atsi/health-staying-active/travelling-alcohol-restricted-areas/> (cited April 10 2015)

<sup>56</sup> An area is classified as a Community if it is a City, Borough, or an unincorporated area with a qualified entity that has received money from the Community Revenue Sharing program at least once within the last five consecutive years. Source: State of Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development, <http://commerce.state.ak.us/DNN/DCRA/CDO/CDOHelp.aspx>

<sup>57</sup> “Alcoholic Beverage Control Board: Dry / Damp Communities”, Jan 22 2015,

<http://commerce.state.ak.us/dnn/Portals/9/pub/Localopt01-22-15.pdf> (cited April 12 2015)

prohibitions against the production, advertising, sale, distribution, or transportation of alcoholic beverages within their boundaries.<sup>58</sup>

### Debates over public drinking bans

Even though public drinking bans were fairly commonplace, they were not without their critics. Generally, public drinking tended to attract more attention, disapproval and dismay when it involved marginalised groups in a given community, such as the homeless, the poor, minority populations (e.g. indigenous groups in New Zealand and Australia), and young people. Opponents of public drinking laws thus argued that such bans infringed on human rights and civil liberties, and could potentially be a source of unfair discrimination. Other critics also maintained that, while such bans may assuage public anxiety, the perceived dangers might not actually be real. As an alternative, some advocated for more holistic approaches in addressing the underlying social, cultural and economic factors that result in public drinking.<sup>59</sup>

In some instances, the use of discretion in enforcing of public drinking bans revealed a degree of sensitivity to the inherent biases in the bans. For instance, a 2012 study that interviewed some police officers in the Melbourne metropolitan area revealed that these officers were directed by senior officers not to issue infringements to socioeconomically disadvantaged or other minority groups, but instead give them a warning, and fines only as a last resort. However, the extent to which such directives were followed was not clear.<sup>60</sup>

### Effectiveness of Bans

In some jurisdictions, promising results were reported from public drinking restrictions. For example, in Birmingham, UK, police described the effects of alcohol restrictions imposed on alcohol free zones in the city as “incredibly positive”, as they attributed these areas’ drop in drink related crime to the policy<sup>61</sup>.

A more qualified assessment was offered by a 2012 review of 16 evaluations of street drinking bans in 13 locations in the UK, New Zealand and Australia. It concluded that such bans tended to improve perceptions of safety and cleanliness of the areas—though in some instances the borders of the zones suffered a worsened perception of safety—and were typically well-supported by police, traders and older people.

However, bans tended to be enforced inconsistently, and to affect marginalised groups such as the homeless, indigenous people and the young negatively. As these groups were disallowed from congregating in familiar spaces, they could no longer tap on previously established social networks. Furthermore these groups reported feeling discriminated against by the restrictions, and that they were inadequately consulted.

Displacement was another common occurrence observed, as drinkers would move to the edge of the defined zones, or seek out covert places where the police seldom patrolled.

Furthermore, in some jurisdictions, such as the City of Darebin, in Australia, the street drinking ban did not seem to reduce the visibility of street drinking, because of patchy police

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<sup>58</sup> David J. Hanson, Ph.D “Dry Counties”

<http://www2.potsdam.edu/alcohol/Controversies/1140551076.html#.VSdACfmUd9k> (cited April 11 2015)

<sup>59</sup> Amy E. Pennay, “Wicked problems’ : The social conundrum presented by public drinking laws”, *Drugs: education, prevention and policy*, June 2012: 19(3): 185-191

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> “Birmingham and Black Country alcohol restrictions 'cut crime' “ *BBC News*, Jan 16 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-birmingham-21040720> (cited Apr 10 2015)

enforcement, as well as because some drinkers prioritised socialising in their old drinking spots over receiving fines from ignoring the set restrictions.<sup>62</sup>

***Case Question Part One:***

You are part of a taskforce set up to examine how to reduce the problems caused by public drinking in Singapore. More specifically, you are asked to study whether to recommend a targeted approach of designating certain areas as ‘no-alcohol’ zones, or a blanket ban.

In your recommendation, you should consider the following:

- Would you recommend a blanket ban on drinking in public, or more targeted alcohol restrictions on specific areas? If the latter, which areas would you pick? What are the likely problems or controversies associated with either option, and how can they be addressed?
- Who are the stakeholders likely to be affected by the imposition of alcohol restricted zones? Should they be consulted as part of policy-formulation, and if so how?
- Are there policy alternatives to banning public drinking? If so, what might they be?

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<sup>62</sup> Amy Pennay, Robin Room, “Prohibiting public drinking in urban public spaces: A review of the evidence” *Drugs: education, prevention and policy*, April 2012; 19(2): 91–101

## Part Two: New Curbs on Public Drinking

In January 2015, the Singapore Parliament passed a new Bill, the Liquor Control (Supply and Consumption) Bill<sup>63</sup>. This bill banned public consumption of alcohol from 10.30pm to 7am in public places island-wide, including parks and public housing void decks. Retail shops island-wide were also disallowed from selling liquor after 10.30pm.

Should a first-time offender drink publicly after the stipulated time, he or she could be slapped with a fine of up to \$1,000, while repeat offenders could receive fines of up to \$2,000, as well as jail-term of up to three months. Those selling alcohol beyond trading hours stipulated in their licences were liable to a maximum fine of \$10,000.

The Bill also defined **Liquor Control Zones** in Geylang and Little India (see **Annex B** for boundary of the zones), where stricter restrictions on the supply and consumption of liquor would be imposed, on weekends and public holidays. Should alcohol-related offences be committed within these zones, offenders would face enhanced penalties of 1.5 times that in non-designated areas.<sup>64</sup>



**Exhibit 5:** Liquor Control Zone sign in Little India, 2015. Author's photograph

The Ministry of Home Affairs explained that while the measures and proposed penalties sounded harsh, the police would take a calibrated approach in enforcing them. In the first instance, the police would request the offending person to dispose his or her liquor, and possibly also to leave the area if he or she was causing a public annoyance. If the person complied, no further action would be taken. However, should a person ignore this request, the police would consider issuing a fine or arresting the person. Those deemed disorderly or a threat to public order and safety were also liable for arrest.<sup>65</sup>

The Bill came into effect on April 1 2015.

### Rationale and Formulation of the Bill

The Bill was a culmination of a two-year review by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), which started in September 2012. According to the Second Minister for Home Affairs, Mr. S Iswaran, the review was initiated in response to “considerable public feedback on law and order concerns and disamenities arising from liquor consumption and drunkenness in public places.” He further cited various incidents of violence linked to the consumption of alcohol—47 cases of rioting, 100 cases of affray and 115 cases of serious hurt in 2014—and noted the rising trend in such incidents.

<sup>63</sup> Parliament of Singapore, The Liquor Control (Supply and Consumption) Bill, 30 Jan 2015, “[https://www.parliament.gov.sg/sites/default/files/Liquor%20Control%20\(Supply%20and%20Consumption\)%20Bill%201-2015.pdf](https://www.parliament.gov.sg/sites/default/files/Liquor%20Control%20(Supply%20and%20Consumption)%20Bill%201-2015.pdf) (cited Apr 6 2015)

<sup>64</sup> Lim Yi Han, “Parliament: New Bill tabled to ban public consumption of alcohol from 10.30pm to 7am islandwide” *The Straits Times*, Jan 19 2015, <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/singapore/more-singapore-stories/story/new-bill-tabled-ban-public-consumption-alcohol-1030pm-7a#sthash.hGSbEQH1.dpuf>; Lim Yi Han, “Parliament: New liquor law passed, public drinking at late night will be illegal” *The Straits Times* Jan 30 2015, <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/singapore/more-singapore-stories/story/parliament-new-liquor-law-passed-public-drinking-late-ni>; (cited Apr 20 2015)

<sup>65</sup> Lim Yi Han, “Police to take measured response to illegal drinking”, *The Straits Times*, 21 Jan 2015, <http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/police-take-measured-response-illegal-drinking> (cited Apr 20 2015)

When introducing the Bill, Minister Iswaran took pains to explain MHA's rationale for implementing an island-wide restriction on public drinking, rather than in specific problem areas. First, he shared that liquor related problems were not confined only to certain area-specific "hot spots". Secondly, having finely delineated liquor control zones within an area or neighbourhood with a mix of residential uses, common spaces and retail uses could lead to public confusion about where drinking was disallowed, and would also make compliance and enforcement of the restrictions difficult. He further emphasised that the designation of special zones is likely to displace activity to neighbouring areas<sup>66</sup>. Having a blanket, non-location specific drinking ban thus allowed MHA to avoid these practical constraints.

As part of the review, MHA conducted public consultation exercises between October 2013 and August 2014. As part of their consultation, they received approximately 400 pieces of written feedback, engaged about 180 stakeholder groups, and concluded that participants were 'unequivocal in their support for the introduction of measures to curb retail sale of liquor, and its consumption in public places to keep their neighbourhoods safe and minimise the occurrence of fights, rowdiness and other disamenities'<sup>67</sup>. (For details of the public consultation, please refer to **Annex C**)

### **Reactions to the Bill**

When the Bill was debated in Parliament, most MPs gave their firm support, though some also called for greater flexibility in implementation.<sup>68</sup>

MP Denise Phua expressed her satisfaction that that the Ministry of Home Affairs took a "calibrated and tiered approach, with stricter measures for higher-risk areas such as Little India and ring-fencing (of) residential common areas such as void decks and corridors".

Opposition MPs from the Workers' Party (WP) provided more qualified support for "the principle of the Bill to empower the Government to regulate the supply and consumption of liquor in public places", but maintained that there was need to address "public anxiety about the extent of the restrictions mooted" and "calibrate the operational applications of the Bill"<sup>69</sup>. One WP representative, Yee Jenn Jong, urged for more flexibility for the sales and consumption of liquor in areas further away from residential neighbourhoods.

Non-constituency MP Lina Chiam had stronger words of criticism for the Bill, arguing that public consultation for the Bill was not properly representative, because of its relatively limited outreach. She also challenged that there was a lack of data proving that public order offences in the proposed Liquor Control Zones, Geylang and Little India, were caused alcohol She called for increased policing instead of legislation to solve the problems of public drinking, as well as for extending the cut-off time for public drinking to 11.30pm to allow foreign workers more time to do so on their time off.<sup>70</sup>

A phone survey of 1,145 randomly selected respondents, conducted by government feedback unit Reach soon after the announcement of the Bill revealed broad support from the public for the proposed drinking ban, with 81 per cent expressing agreement with the Bill. 82 per cent indicated that they did not think the Bill would affect their lifestyle and activities while 80

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<sup>66</sup> Parliament of Singapore, The Liquor Control (Supply and Consumption) Bill,

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Amir Hussain, "Parliament: Alcohol curbs tough but necessary", The Straits Times, Jan 20 2015, <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/singapore/courts-crime/story/alcohol-curbs-tough-necessary-say-mps-20150120> (cited April 20 2015)

<sup>69</sup> Parliament of Singapore, Liquor Control (Supply and Consumption) Bill

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

percent also believed that the new regulations would help reduce the cases of public drunkenness.<sup>71</sup>

However, a separate poll conducted by the Straits Times newspaper painted a completely different picture, with 78% of over 9,000 self-selected respondents disagreeing with the proposed Bill. While this poll was not representative of the general Singaporean public, the strong negative response recorded suggested that there was significant opposition from certain segments of the population.<sup>72</sup>

### Affected Groups: Foreign Workers, Young people and Alcohol Retailers

One particularly controversial aspect of the Bill was its designation of foreign worker dormitories as ‘public spaces’. Second Minister for Home Affairs S Iswaran clarified that the Bill did not forbid workers from consuming liquor within their dormitories per se, but was intended to curb drunken behavior in the dorms<sup>73</sup>. For instance, under the Bill, a person who was drunk and unable to take care of himself within worker dormitories could be fined or jailed, or both, if charged and convicted.<sup>74</sup> This provision was already included in the existing Miscellaneous Offences Act, and was merely transferred to the new Bill.<sup>75</sup>

Nevertheless, non-government organisations advocating for foreign workers’ welfare expressed their concerns that this provision, as well as the specific clampdowns on Little India and Geylang during weekends infringed on whatever little space the foreign workers had for leisure and relaxation. Executive director of the Humanitarian Organisation for Migrant Economics (HOME) Jolovan Wham said, “It’s like we’re singling them (foreign workers) out, stereotyping that they need to be controlled just because of the Little India riot [...] I’d understand if the dormitories have their own rules and regulations such as curfews or anything like that, but to turn it into a law that comes with fines and jail terms, that is very harsh”. Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) executive committee member Debbie Fordyce commented that banning alcohol sales and drinking in public spaces after 10.30pm islandwide meant workers had few places left to relax with a drink<sup>76</sup>.

Young drinkers reacted negatively to the proposed ban, arguing that the bans on public drinking should be kept to residential zones only, or that drinking hours should be extended in entertainment districts like Clarke Quay. Others lamented that the ban would render areas like Clarke Quay less ‘happening’ (i.e. vibrant)<sup>77</sup>.

Another group up in arms about the proposed Bill was alcohol retailers and provision shop owners in little India and Geylang, who lamented that the restrictions would kill their businesses, many of which were built on alcohol sales late in the day to foreign workers<sup>78</sup>. In fact, two days

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<sup>71</sup> REACH Media Release, “4 in 5 respondents polled supportive of proposed Bill on alcohol restrictions” Jan 27 2015, [http://www.reach.gov.sg/portals/0/Liquor%20Control%20Bill%20Poll%20Media%20Release%20\(final-web\).pdf](http://www.reach.gov.sg/portals/0/Liquor%20Control%20Bill%20Poll%20Media%20Release%20(final-web).pdf) (cited April 20 2015)

<sup>72</sup> Melissa Heng, “Majority of ST online readers disagree with proposed new alcohol restrictions” *The Straits Times*, Jan 20 2015, <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/singapore/more-singapore-stories/story/majority-st-readers-disagree-proposed-new-alcohol-restri> (cited April 20 2015)

<sup>73</sup> Parliament of Singapore, Liquor Control (Supply and Consumption) Bill

<sup>74</sup> Emilia Tan, “Planned laws on foreign-worker dorms ‘infringe personal space’” *TODAY*, Jan 21 2015.

<sup>75</sup> Parliament of Singapore, Liquor Control (Supply and Consumption) Bill

<sup>76</sup> Emilia Tan

<sup>77</sup> Amir Hussain and Lim Yi Han, “Dismay for young clubbers, relief for residents” *The Straits Times*, Jan 20 2015.

<sup>78</sup> Jessica Lim and Cheryl Faith Wee, “Retailers expect to be hit hard by curbs” *The Straits Times*, Jan 20 2015, <http://www.straitstimes.com/the-big-story/alcohol-bill/story/retailers-expect-be-hit-hard-curbs-20150120> (cited Apr 20 2015)

after the restrictions came into effect, alcohol retailers in Geylang and Little India, the two Special Zones, reported drops in sales of as much as 90%—which came up to hundreds of dollars per day—and predicted difficulty selling enough to keep their business afloat.<sup>79</sup>

On the other hand, club and bar owners welcomed the introduction of the new law. According to Singapore Nightlife Business Association president Dennis Foo, "[r]etailers are selling their alcohol at a fraction of our bar price. Many purchase cheap alcohol from convenience stores, get themselves drunk in places like Read Bridge, and enter the bars and clubs and make a nuisance and get into fights. We get the brunt of this and it's really unfair."<sup>80</sup>

### ***Case Question Part Two:***

As the former member of the Taskforce, you have been invited to meet with the MHA to share your frank views of the Bill. You prepare talking points for the session that detail your assessment of the new Bill:

- How effective do you think the proposed law will be in solving the problems of public drunkenness, and why?
- What are the shortcomings of the Bill You may wish to consider the impact on stakeholders as well as the process by which the Bill was passed.
- What are the changes you would make, if possible, to the Bill?

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<sup>79</sup> Janice Heng, "Alcohol sales plunge as new curbs kick in", *The Straits Times*, April 4 2015, <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/singapore/more-singapore-stories/story/alcohol-sales-plunge-new-curbs-kick-20150404#sthash.Nzi0jgIt.dpuf> (cited April 14 2015)

<sup>80</sup> Amir Hussain and Lim Yi Han

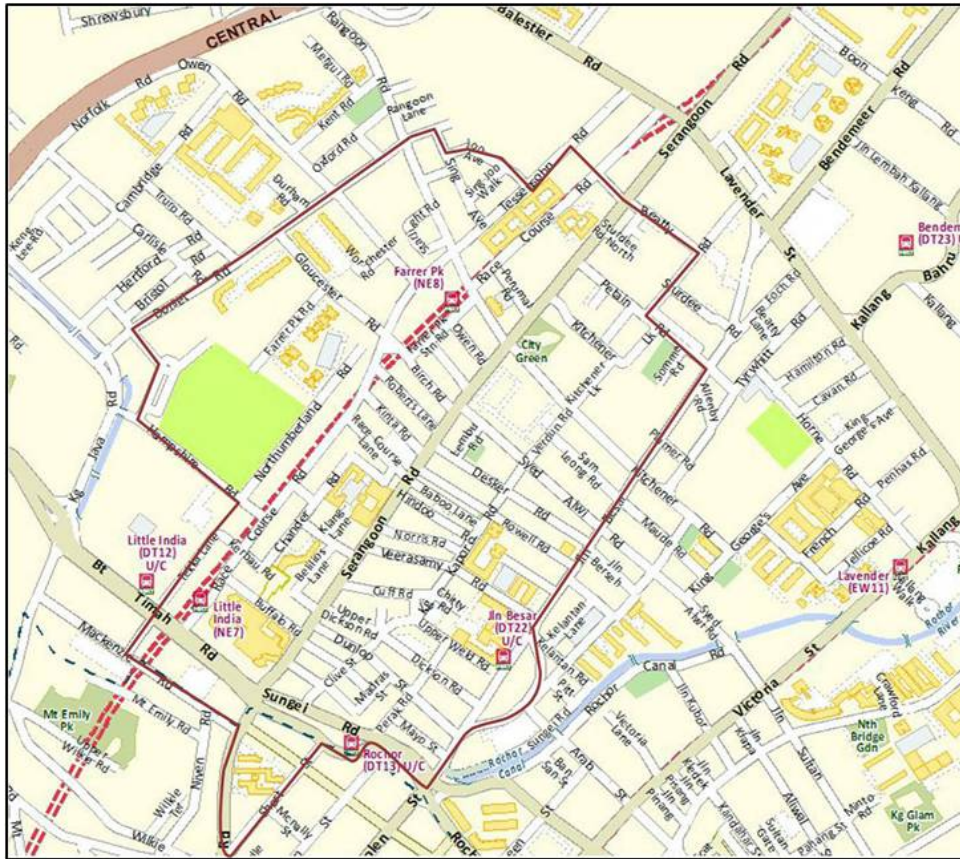
### Extract from “Comparing alcohol affordability in 65 cities worldwide”

Alcohol Affordability (AA) is defined by the proportion of median daily income needed to buy a certain quantity of a defined alcoholic beverage.

City	Daily income (US\$)	Scotch (700 mL) Low (US\$)	AA	Rank
Zurich	112.60	17.30	0.15	1
Luxembourg	80.82	13.28	0.16	2
Geneva	89.32	16.74	0.19	3
Brussels	62.74	15.30	0.24	4
Milan	49.04	12.41	0.25	5
Copenhagen	73.70	19.01	0.26	6
Frankfurt	55.62	15.18	0.27	7
Tokyo	80.55	22.14	0.27	8
Chicago	73.15	20.52	0.28	9
Lyon	53.42	15.18	0.28	10
Barcelona	52.33	14.92	0.29	11
Miami	64.93	18.79	0.29	12
Dublin	80.27	24.33	0.30	13
Rome	41.64	12.66	0.30	14
Madrid	50.96	15.52	0.30	15
Los Angeles	77.26	23.79	0.31	16
Paris	53.70	16.54	0.31	17
New York	80.00	27.21	0.34	18
Toronto	59.18	20.58	0.35	19
Montreal	58.08	20.95	0.36	20
Sydney	59.73	22.42	0.38	21
Vienna	58.63	22.57	0.38	22
Auckland	38.63	15.12	0.39	23
Berlin	58.08	22.77	0.39	24
London	63.29	25.34	0.40	25
Athens	39.45	16.37	0.41	26
Lisbon	39.18	16.44	0.42	27
Stockholm	61.37	27.01	0.44	28
Hong Kong	45.75	20.23	0.44	29
Helsinki	73.15	32.78	0.45	30
Amsterdam	57.81	26.44	0.46	31
Taipei	30.68	15.78	0.51	32
Munich	58.63	31.65	0.54	33
Johannesburg	19.45	11.88	0.61	34
Oslo	72.60	45.12	0.62	35
Dubai	37.26	24.41	0.66	36
Seoul	25.75	18.70	0.73	37
Tel Aviv	43.84	31.84	0.73	38
Prague	23.56	19.38	0.82	39
Santiago de Cl	16.44	14.12	0.86	40
Warsaw	17.53	15.28	0.87	41
Bratislava	21.10	21.00	1.00	42
Singapore	30.14	32.13	1.07	43
Bangkok	15.07	18.00	1.19	44
Bogotá	12.88	16.19	1.26	45
Manama	23.01	28.95	1.26	46
Budapest	15.07	19.32	1.28	47
Moscow	20.55	27.38	1.33	48
Buenos Aires	13.97	19.01	1.36	49
São Paulo	17.81	24.24	1.36	50
Bucharest	12.05	17.11	1.42	51
Shanghai	12.60	18.83	1.49	52
Istanbul	17.81	27.42	1.54	53
Rio de Janeiro	14.79	24.29	1.64	54
Kuala Lumpur	13.15	21.64	1.65	55
Lima	11.78	20.06	1.70	56
Kiev	9.59	19.07	1.99	57
Mexico City	7.12	15.41	2.16	58
Beijing	9.32	21.64	2.32	59
Caracas	17.26	41.84	2.42	60
Delhi	6.03	14.90	2.47	61
Manila	5.48	14.34	2.62	62
Nairobi	7.95	23.79	2.99	63
Mumbai	4.93	27.08	5.49	64
Jakarta	4.66	27.51	5.91	65



Little India Liquor Control Zone



Geylang Liquor Control Zone



Source: Singapore Statutes Online, Liquor Control (Supply and Consumption) (Declaration of Liquor Control Zones) Order 2015, <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p?page=0;query=DocId%3A5b71beb7-468d-4a70-9d5c-64a9e46f0a8b%20Depth%3A0%20Status%3Ainforce;rec=0;whole=yes>

## MHA's Public Consultation on Measures to Manage Liquor Sale and Consumption in Public Places

1. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and REACH completed two phases of public consultation to consult the general public and stakeholders on (a) restricting public consumption of liquor; and (b) shortening the sale hours of liquor at retail outlets.
2. The first phase of the consultation was held from 29 October 2013 to 31 December 2013. MHA conducted the second phase of public consultation from 16 June 2014 to 29 August 2014. In total, 395 pieces of written feedback were received and 624 members of the public participated in the Electronic Poll (e-poll) during both phases of the public consultation.
3. As part of the consultation, the Ministry also conducted extensive focus group discussions with a large group of stakeholders, including grassroots leaders, Members of Parliament, residents and businesses. These discussions, involving almost 200 stakeholders, allowed MHA to gain a more in-depth understanding on the issue and incorporate relevant feedback into the policy formulation process.

The first phase of the consultation<sup>81</sup> sought public inputs on

- (i) Designating “permanent no-alcohol zones” where people are not allowed to consume or carry open bottles of liquor. These could include common areas such as void decks, parks, playgrounds and areas around MRT stations
- (ii) Designate “problematic areas” as “temporary no-alcohol zones”. These could include bridges at the Singapore River where groups of youth are typically seen drinking —
- (iii) Shortening the sale hours of alcohol, either at all retail outlets or only in ‘problematic’ areas

The second phase of the consultation<sup>82</sup> looked at different models to restrict public consumption and sale of alcohol. Possible measures to restrict public consumption included:

- (i) Partial Restriction with Selective Enforcement - This allows targeted restriction with selective enforcement against people who create a nuisance when consuming alcohol.
- (ii) Partial Restriction by Place - This allows targeted restriction to be imposed at problematic hotspots where large groups of people often congregate and drink alcohol
- (iii) Partial Restriction by Time - This allows targeted restriction by prohibiting public consumption of alcohol late at night.
- (iv) Wider Restriction - This model effectively reduces public consumption of alcohol, as the restriction is applied in all places and at all times.

As for measures to restrict sales of alcohol at retail outlets, MHA sought inputs on the following suggestions:

- (i) End retail sale of alcohol by 2am in entertainment districts
- (ii) End retail sale of alcohol by 12am in residential areas;

<sup>81</sup> Amanda Lee and Tiara Hamarian, “Tighter rules on alcohol sale, drinking in the offing “, *Today*, 26 Nov 2013, “<http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/tighter-rules-alcohol-sale-drinking-offing?singlepage=true> (cited Apr 7 2015)

<sup>82</sup> Ministry of Health, “Launch of Phase II of the Public Consultation on Strengthening Measures on Liquor Sale and Consumption at Public Places”, Jun 16 2014, <http://www.mha.gov.sg/Newsroom/press-releases/Pages/Launch-of-Phase-II-of-the-Public-Consultation-on-Strengthening-Measures-on-Liquor-Sale-and-Consumption-at-Public-Places.aspx>

- (iii) End retail sale of alcohol earlier (e.g. 9pm) in areas where people tend to congregate and consume alcohol in public places.

Responses to proposed measures to restrict public consumption of liquor

4. MHA concluded that most respondents strongly supported restricting public consumption of liquor, especially in public places in the immediate vicinity of residential areas after certain hours. Of the 246 written feedback received on this proposal in Phase I of the consultation, 83% of the respondents expressed support. In Phase II, 88% of the 43 pieces of written feedback received either supported a partial ban (by time or place) or a wider ban, where alcohol consumption would be banned in all public places at all times. Of the 624 persons who participated in the e-poll, 88% were also in favour of implementing the restrictions at congregation areas.
5. In terms of restricting the timing on public drinking, the majority of the participants in the focus group discussions said that a blanket island-wide ban on public consumption would be too extreme and restrictive, and that a partial ban by time, say from 10pm onwards, would be more reasonable. Some also suggested imposing additional restrictions in areas with higher crime rates and incidence of disorderliness.<sup>83</sup>

Responses to proposed measure to shorten retail sale hours of liquor

6. In the first phase of the public consultation, 76% of the 96 respondents who provided written feedback on the proposal to shorten retail hours expressed support to shorten the retail hours of liquor. In general, respondents preferred the retail hours within residential areas to end earlier (e.g. before midnight), compared to entertainment belts. The results were echoed in Phase II of the consultation exercise, with 79% of the 24 who provided written feedback on this proposal supporting shorter retail sale hours of alcohol.
7. A majority of the focus group participants also supported the proposal to stop the sale of liquor at around 10pm to 12 midnight. The participants felt that the timing would deter impulse buys – particularly for those who congregate and drink – but would not affect the majority who were responsible drinkers.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs, “Strong Support For Measures to Manage Liquor Sale and Consumption in Public Places”, Nov 7 2014, [https://www.mha.gov.sg/news\\_details.aspx?nid=MzI4MQ%3D%3D-VvVPWWsgBL8%3D](https://www.mha.gov.sg/news_details.aspx?nid=MzI4MQ%3D%3D-VvVPWWsgBL8%3D)

<sup>84</sup> Ibid