

The Year in Review: Policy and Political Developments in 2016

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INTRODUCTION

This document provides a review of the key developments in public policy and governance, changes in the political landscape, and cases of civic activism in 2016.

Advanced estimates published by the Ministry of Trade and Industry in January 2017 put Singapore's gross domestic product growth for 2016 at 1.8% (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2017). Singapore's citizen population grew by 1% and the non-resident population grew by 2.5% (National Population and Talent Division, 2016) while the number of permanent residents remained the same.

The annual average unemployment rate in 2016 was 2.1%, up from 2015's 1.9%, with the resident unemployment rate at 3.0% (Ministry of Manpower, 2017a). The Ministry of Manpower also reported slower wage growth of 0.7%; as well as increasing redundancies, attributed to economic restructuring and a slower economic growth (Ministry of Manpower, 2017b).

Singapore's Gini Coefficient dropped to 0.458 in 2016, down from 2015's 0.463, its lowest score for a decade. This was due in part to household income in the top decile growing by 0.2 per cent in real terms in 2016, down from 7.2 per cent 2015 (Yong, 2017). After accounting for Government transfers and taxes, Singapore's Gini coefficient in 2016 is 0.402; the comparable figure for 2015 was 0.409. Median monthly income for employed households increased to \$8,846 in 2016, up from \$8,666 in 2015. This represented a 2.6 per cent rise in real terms, down from 2015's 4.9 per cent (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2017)

POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Budget 2016

Overall budget

While the government proposed spending be raised by \$5.0 billion from 2015, Minister of Finance Heng Swee Keat said he expected a \$3.5 billion surplus at the end of the financial year (Heng S. K., 2016). This was because revenues were also expected to rise by \$4.3 billion, in anticipation of a one-off rise in vehicle taxes collected and Statutory Boards contributions but also higher Net Investment Returns (NIR) Contributions. The change to the NIR framework was expected to take effect, thereby allowing the government to draw on 50% of the expected long-term real rate of return from Temasek Holdings, which was previously not included, raising NIR contribution by \$4.8 billion compared to what was drawn in 2015. This meant that the estimated value of the contribution would be \$14.7 billion. The personal tax regime remained unchanged, with the exception of the capping of the total amount of personal income tax relief at \$80,000 per year.

Economic Restructuring — The Industry Transformation Programme

The budget focused on providing targeted assistance for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to embrace modern technology and grow beyond the country's borders. A new \$400 million Automation Support Package was introduced to subsidise up to 50% of the roll-out or scaling up of automation projects. The SME Mezzanine Growth Fund was also expanded by \$50 million to provide capital for SMEs to internationalise. The Corporate Income Tax rebate for SMEs was raised from 30% to 50%, capped at \$20,000 per year, and the Double Tax Deduction for Internationalisation scheme was extended until 2020. To encourage lending to SMEs, the government introduced an SME Working Capital Loan scheme where the

government would co-share 50% of the default risk for loans of up to \$300,000. A new Business Grants Portal would be set up to help SMEs access the various government schemes.

The second thrust of economic restructuring that was announced was a system of Industry Transformation Plans to enable firms to share best practices and drive down costs. Up to \$30 million was committed to support the Trade Associations and Chambers in developing industry-wide solutions for common challenges their members face. A National Trade Platform would also be developed to enable convenient sharing of trade information among businesses and government. This was expected to bring over \$600 million worth of man-hour savings each year. To encourage the use of robotics technology, \$450 million was committed under the National Robotics Programme which would be disbursed over three years. To drive further innovation, a top up of \$1.5 billion to the National Research Fund was announced and a new entity, SG-Innovate, established to match budding entrepreneurs with mentors and venture capital firms. Finally, the Jurong Innovation District was introduced as a common space for entrepreneurs, researchers and students to design, prototype and test new innovations.

Given the government's new targeted and innovation-centric approach, it announced that the broad-based Productivity and Innovation Credit (PIC) would be scaled down with the cash pay-out rate lowered from 60% to 40% and that it would expire after 2018. This was praised by economists like Dr Walter Theseira, who argued that previous subsidies "have not been spent efficiently by a lot of companies" (Low, 2016). The President of the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises, Kurt Wee, however, warned against doing away entirely with broad-based approaches (Low, 2016). To wean the economy off foreign labour, the levies for Service and Construction Work Permit holders, as well as S Pass holders in every sector would be raised as planned. The Marine and Process sector on the other hand would see levy increases deferred for one year. Property cooling measures introduced previously were not lifted although there were calls for that.

Social support measures

To support Singaporeans who are retrenched during the restructuring process, the Ministry of Manpower introduced the "Adapt and Grow" initiative. The TechSkills Accelerator was also set up to help Singaporeans acquire new skills in the information and communication technologies (ICT) sector. Companies, it was announced, would be further incentivised to hire older and disabled workers through the extension of the Special Employment Credit, which offers wage offsets for such workers to employers. The Workfare Income Supplement scheme was revised to support more low-income workers. The qualifying income ceiling was raised to \$2,000 a month as was the level of pay-outs which would now be released monthly rather than quarterly.

To encourage the formation of families, a new Child Development Account First Step Grant of \$3,000 from the government was introduced for all newborns, without parents having to save first to receive monies as matching grants. Minister for Social and Family Development Tan Chuan-Jin said that the grant would benefit lower-income parents the most (Yong, 2016a). The government would commit \$20 million to pilot the KidSTART programme targeted at children from low-income and vulnerable families given them health, learning and developmental support through their first six years of life. Sociologist Dr Paulin Staughan said this was "very progressive" and that this "age group is often neglected because there is no demonstrable outcome" (*The Straits Times*, 2016a). Under the Fresh Start Housing Scheme — first mentioned by the Prime Minister in the 2015 National Day Rally — it was announced that a \$35,000 grant would be made available to families with young children, who are not eligible for housing grants as first-timers.

As announced in Budget 2015, the Silver Support scheme to provide seniors between \$300 and \$750 every quarter would be implemented in 2016. For low-income households, a one-off GST voucher of up to \$200 and up to three months of rebates for Service and Conservancy Charges was announced.

Some, however, believed that the social support measures were insufficient. Dr Theseira suggested that there should be more “social safety nets for the unemployed” (Low, 2016), while Research and Advocacy Director at AWARE, Dr Vivienne Wee said the budget “missed an opportunity” to provide “care support allowing women to return to work” (*The Straits Times*, 2016a).

National Day Rally 2016

On August 21, Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong gave his annual National Day Rally speech at the ITE College Central (Lee H. L., 2016a). The occasion was most notable because the PM took ill in the middle of this English speech at 9.20pm. He left the stage and returned to give a truncated version of the rest of his speech 80 minutes later (Tham, 2016a). This report will draw from both his prepared speech and his truncated speech.

The NDR speech was grouped into three main talking points: economic challenges, foreign policy challenges and political challenges.

Economic challenge, progressing together

On the economy, the PM spoke of the aspiration for Singapore to be one of the world’s leading cities while ensuring that it is building an inclusive society with no one left behind. PM Lee highlighted the potential impact of technological disruption and said that new models of business were coming “thick and fast” with no let-up in the future. PM Lee said there were two options for the country: close up the economy and allow no new models at all, or embrace change, let disruption happen and help affected workers cope.

To illustrate this, he used the example of traditional taxi companies and the newcomers Grab and Uber. He acknowledged the concerns of existing taxi drivers — while they still enjoyed certain advantages like being able to pick passengers up from the kerb, there were disadvantages, such as minimum mileage that drivers had to clock.

Every industry would be disrupted and disrupted differently. The government’s solution was for public organisations, such as the Economic Development Board and Infocomm Development Authority, to work with industries and trade associations one by one to develop specific programmes to help companies, as well as prepare workers to do good, different, and new jobs throughout their lives. This was the purpose of the Committee on the Future Economy (CFE) which had three broad themes to explore: building new capabilities, promoting entrepreneurship, and developing skills, which he went on to explicate with examples.

Securing our place in the world

The second theme of the NDR was about securing Singapore’s place in the world. First, the PM focused on Singapore’s continuing relationship with the United States (US) and China, emphasising long-standing and strong ties with both.

He spoke about the challenge of maintaining good relations while still asserting Singapore’s own national interests; the need to balance competing interests. He referred to the competing claims to territories in the South China Sea and said that while Singapore is not a claimant state, it has a strong interest in maintaining international rule of law, freedom of navigation in

the area, and a united and effective ASEAN. Since ASEAN member states were involved in competing claims with China, it is a complicated situation.

PM Lee emphasised that Singapore had to take a principled and consistent stand, which might differ from other nations. Doing this however was sometimes at the cost of receiving criticism in the Chinese media or from friends and business partners. PM Lee reminded the audience that Singapore-China relations were more broad-based than the issues in the South China Sea and that disruption to that relationship would be detrimental to both nations. While wishing to strengthen friendship and cooperation between the two, the government had to prepare for ups and downs in that relationship, and be prepared to take a stand in Singapore's interest.

PM Lee also spoke about Singapore's "most important partners": Malaysia and Indonesia. Relations were good as evidenced by several meetings between himself and the leaders of both nations, as well as bilateral projects, such as building the high-speed rail between Singapore and Malaysia, addressing the haze from Indonesia and combating terrorism.

PM Lee noted that there had been several instances of potential terrorist attack, noting a plan by terrorists in Batam to launch a rocket at the Marina Bay Sands Hotel at a distance of about 20 kilometres. The plan had been foiled by Indonesian police. PM Lee also highlighted several ongoing possible threats emanating from terrorist groups that concerned not just Singapore, but Malaysia and Indonesia as well. He mentioned that there were people who had travelled to Syria to fight in its civil war from those countries could return to launch attacks the region.

While Singapore had been fortunate thus far, it was necessary to prepare for the possibility of a successful attack, and the strain that such an attack might put upon Singapore's multiracial society. Singaporeans would need to stand together, show collective will and not be cowed after an attack, regardless of the origin of the attacker.

Ensuring good politics in Singapore

When PM Lee returned to the podium after taking ill, he addressed a few more issues, the first of which was leadership succession. He announced that Mr Lawrence Wong would be appointed Second Minister of Finance, to assist Minister of Finance Heng Swee Keat with the Ministry's operational details while Heng recovered more fully from the stroke he suffered earlier in May (Lee H. L., 2016b).

Saying that building up leadership and preparing for succession was one of his top priorities, PM Lee indicated that nothing had changed in his timetable or his resolve to "press on with a succession". He would reinforce his political team in the next general election and, he said his successor had to be ready to take over from him soon after that.

PM Lee talked about developments in Singapore over the past decade and a half - "not so long that you cannot remember what happened before or that you cannot imagine what will come in 15 years' time." He went through a period defined by 9/11, and the infrastructural and economic changes that have taken place since. That set the scene for his description of the changes in urban development that are to come - the expansion of Changi Airport, the building of the Tuas mega port, and the extension of MRT lines. He stressed the importance of aiming high, and the importance of intangibles, such as the growth of the "Singapore Spirit".

In his prepared but undelivered text, the PM was to have addressed the rationale for the changes that the government would make to Singapore's system of Elected President (EP). He described the changes to the Council of Presidential Advisers as being "the most straightforward", with the President being elected but "not acting alone". He said the proposed changes were "incremental and straightforward" (Lee H. L., 2016a).

The changes to the qualifying criteria were required because as time has gone on, the sums of money that the EP oversee had increased significantly, while the qualifying criteria had not changed. It was necessary for the President to be “competent, to be on top of the job, to be capable and that is why we need the most qualified person.”

PM Lee explained that the decision was made when the system was first introduced, to observe how it worked and then make amendments as necessary; the priority at the time was finding qualified candidates to contest. With the prospect of more hotly contested elections in the future, there was now a need for the provision for multiracial representation.

PM Lee’s health

The Prime Minister’s Office released a statement the next day which read that the Prime Minister “underwent a series of checks at Singapore General Hospital last night and this morning. The Prime Minister had taken ill during the National Day Rally due to a temporary drop in blood pressure, due to prolonged standing, exhaustion, and dehydration. Doctors have confirmed there were no cardiac abnormalities and no stroke (Prime Minister’s Office, Singapore, 2016)”.

The Prime Minister returned to the stage at around 10.40 pm that evening, at the Rally, about 80 minutes after leaving it. (Tham, 2016a)

Reactions

Reactions to the NDR were dominated by discussion about the PM taking ill. Social media users expressed concern, and ultimately relief (AsiaOne, 2016a), although not all comments were complimentary (Lee J. , 2016). International attention would also be drawn to the incident, with newspapers such as *The Guardian* noting it (Agence France-Presse, 2016). The incident, coupled with PM Lee returning to the podium to speak about succession and Singapore’s future certainly sharpened minds towards those topics (Yong, 2016b).

Committee on the Future Economy

The Committee on the Future Economy (CFE) was established at the end of 2015 to assess how Singapore will plan its economy in an age of technological disruption, a “rapidly changing global environment” and an ageing society. The CFE was tasked with making recommendations on five themes: “digital economy, jobs and skills for the future, Singapore as a connected city, innovation, and governance” (Lee P. , 2017).

The CFE is co-chaired by Minister of Finance Heng Swee Keat, and Minister for Trade and Industry (Industry) S. Iswaran. The latter was initially the committee’s deputy-chair, becoming co-chair after Heng suffered a stroke in May. Due to this, Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office Chan Chun Seng was appointed deputy-chair of the CFE (Ng J. Y., 2016).

Although the CFE’s report was expected to be published before the end of 2016, this was not to be till February 2017. The CFE held more than 80 discussions, and 20 panel discussions, seminars and conferences, reaching out to over 9,000 stakeholders (Lee P. , CFE report, 2017). Other organisations have also published work or held events in support of the CFE. IPS collaborated with the CFE to mount a national conference in July and also organised a scenario-planning project around the themes of innovation, skills and longevity called “Action Plan Singapore” (IPS, 2016).

The CFE was thought to have an extremely difficult job, with an editorial in *The Business Times* opining at the beginning of the year that the committee had “its work cut out” (*The Business Times*, 2016). It noted that “there is no major global crisis in the backdrop or domestic

trigger as such for the latest economic review”, but noted that there were plenty of “economic headwinds” facing Singapore which would make planning for the future difficult with the great deal of uncertainty that businesses and workers faced. Some commenters also warned that while the CFE rightfully looks ahead in its planning, there was plenty of worry regarding the immediate future (The Middle Ground, 2016).

LAW AND ORDER

The Administration of Justice (Protection) Bill

On July 11, the Administration of Justice (Protection) Bill was introduced in Parliament. The stated purpose of the bill was threefold: to define contempt of court; specify defences to contempt of court; and set out punishment for contempt of court offences (Ministry of Law, Singapore, 2016). Minister of Law K. Shanmugam, speaking after the passage of the Bill, stated that it did not “substantively change the legal position on what one is permitted to say about the judiciary and ongoing court proceedings” (Chong Z. L., 2016a).

Unusually, opposition to this Bill arose from different sources. All nine Worker’s Party (WP) members of parliament (MPs) and non-constituency members of parliament (NCMPs) opposed it arguing against four aspects: the government’s ability to comment on ongoing proceedings, when ordinary citizens would not be allowed to; the perceived harshness of the maximum penalty, which at \$100,000 and three years of jail time exceeded the previous maximum of \$25,000 and six weeks of jail time; the perceived lowering of threshold for scandalising the judiciary from “real risk” to “risk”; and that there had not been adequate public consultation on it (The Workers’ Party, 2016).

Three nominated members of parliament (NMPs) would, separately, voice similar concerns. NMP Kok Heng Leun submitted a petition signed by 249 Singaporeans which stated the position that the new powers were vague; that it lowered the threshold for conviction; and that the increased penalties were far too harsh for a non-violent crime. The worry was that the new rules might stifle “legitimate expression and discussion on matters of public interest” (Don’t Kena Contempt, 2016a). The petition was part of a campaign called “Don’t Kena Contempt” (Don’t Kena Contempt, 2016b). NMP Kok, along with fellow NMPs Madhev Mohan and Kuik Shiao-Yin also submitted 14 proposed changes to the Bill which they felt would make the legislation clearer, but the proposals were withdrawn after the parliamentary debate (Chong Z. L., 2016a, 2016b).

The Bill also attracted criticism from outside Singapore, with Amnesty International calling it a “threat to freedom of expression” (Amnesty International, 2016). NMP Kok would later detail his decision-making process, stating that while he still had concerns over about it, on balance he agreed with some major aspects and decided to vote in favour of the changes to “honour the negotiation and discussion” (Kok, 2016).

Online Gambling

On September 28, the Ministry of Home Affairs announced that two operators, Singapore Pools and the Singapore Turf Club, had been “found suitable” to be exempted from the Remote Gambling Act (Kotwani & Chia, 2016). The Act, in place since February 2015, bans online gambling, and has resulted in “hundreds of websites that offer remote gambling services being blocked” (Chow & Lin, 2016).

Both organisations are part of the Singapore Totalisator Board, a statutory board under the Ministry of Finance, and are not-for-profit organisations that “contributed to public, social and charitable causes in Singapore,” thus allowing for the exemption. The exemptions were not a

surprise as these organisations had applied a year before with the government stating that there would be such a provision as then Second Minister for Home Affairs S. Iswaran had said, “an outright ban could drive illegal remote gambling activity underground” (Chow & Lin, 2016).

Several organisations and groups objected to the exemptions, with the National Council of Churches (NCCS) saying on October 5 that it was “deeply concerned”, and this development sent “confusing and conflicting signals” (Channel NewsAsia, 2016a). In response, the government met with representatives of NCCS for a “candid and important face-to-face discussion”, after which the NCCS said the government’s partial but controlled exemption was a “judgement call” and that given “the data on the current remote gambling landscape”, it was the best approach to prevent such activities from going “underground” and to therefore minimise the associated “law and order concerns” (Zacchaeus, 2016).

The WP also called on the government to reject the applications prior to the exemptions being granted. On September 27, the WP’s Assistant Secretary-General Pritam Singh issued a statement on the WP’s website that the party opposed any exemption to the Remote Gambling Bill (Channel NewsAsia, 2016b).

The government defended its decision, with Minister for Social and Family Development Tan Chuan-Jin saying in Parliament that the exemptions were not for the purposes of “encouraging” gambling, but to recognise its presence and to provide a “safer space” to manage it (Channel NewsAsia, 2016c). This was in response to a question by fellow People’s Action Party (PAP) MP Lee Bee Wah who had raised concerns, as did four of her colleagues, including Denise Phua (Lin, 2016).

TRANSPORT

New Bus Contracting Model

On September 1, the Land Transport Authority (LTA) of Singapore rolled out its new Bus Contracting Model, or BCM (Channel NewsAsia, 2016d). Under the BCM, the LTA would own all bus infrastructure, such as depots, and operating assets like the vehicles (Ministry of Transport, Singapore, 2016). Bus operators would then be paid by the LTA to operate bus services with those assets, with the government retaining fare revenue. The LTA’s stated reason for moving to the BCM was to “promote greater competition and efficiency” which it hoped would result in better and more cost-effective public bus services. It would also allow the government to “respond faster to changes in travel demand and service level expectations”.

Singapore’s bus services would be divided into 14 packages (Land Transport Authority, 2016a). SBS Transit would operate eight of these for the fee of \$5.3 billion; SMRT Buses would operate three packages for \$1.86 billion. The remaining three were tendered out via competitive tendering. The first of these, the Bulim Package, was secured by UK-based bus firm Tower Transit Singapore, which started operations in Singapore in May. The second was taken up by Go-Ahead Singapore, which started operations in September. The final package is currently operated by SBS and SMRT until it is taken over by a successful tenderer in 2018 (Land Transport Authority, 2016b).

For the immediate period, the key change has been the across-the-board rise in starting pay for bus captains (Heng J. , 2016). Tower Transit, SBS Transit and Go-Ahead Singapore raised their bus captains’ starting pay to above \$1,900, a move that was welcomed by the National Transport Workers’ Union.

New Rail Financing Framework and Temasek Buyout

On July 25, the LTA announced the introduction of a new licensing scheme aimed at alleviating the financial risk of current rail operators by transferring ownership of existing operating assets, such as trains and the signalling system, to the LTA. The announcement came after nearly four years of negotiation between SMRT and the LTA.

Under the new scheme, termed the New Rail Financing Framework (NRFF), the LTA assumes responsibility of purchasing and upgrading Singapore's overall rail assets, thereby allowing operators to better focus on providing more responsive day-to-day operations and maintenance of the rail network. In turn, operators pay a licensing fee to the LTA to continue operating their respective rail services with an overall licence tenure of 15 years, down from 30–40 years under the previous framework. Upon expiration, companies will have to tender for a new operating license. The framework would see the transfer of over 60,000 rail assets valued at nearly S\$1 billion with the LTA paying out the total sum in tranches, beginning with 60% upon the date of the transition, and the remaining 40% distributed across the subsequent three years (Land Transport Authority, 2016c).

The adoption of the NRFF will also see current rail operator SMRT having to meet more stringent maintenance standards, with an estimated 20% maintenance staff increase in the next three years. Speaking to Channel NewsAsia, President and Chief Executive Officer of SMRT Desmond Kuek welcomed the new scheme at a time where declining profitability of SMRT's core rail business, spurred on by rising operational expenses and increased capital commitments had exerted "additional pressure on future cash flows and profits of the SMRT train entities." SMRT said the new framework would lower overall business risk, stating that the current framework had become "unsustainable" in light of declining rail margins and increasing operating expenditure since 2012 (Channel NewsAsia, 2016e).

SMRT itself was subject to a \$1.18 billion buyout by Singapore state investment firm Temasek Holdings (Gerald, 2016). The buyout was approved by the SMRT shareholders and the company was subsequently delisted from the Singapore Stock Exchange. Some commentators, such as SIM University lecturer Park Byung Joon said that "should SMRT become fully owned by Temasek, a Singapore investment firm owned by the Government, it would still be a long way from nationalisation" (Lim A. , 2016), but *The Straits Times'* transport editor Christopher Tan noted that with the buyout, SMRT would once again be owned, ultimately, by the state, albeit not directly (Tan C. , 2016).

GOVERNANCE

Ongoing Aljunied-Hougang Town Council governance issues

In the general election of 2015, the WP lost the Punggol East Single Member Constituency, a seat that it had gained in a 2013 by-election. The loss of this seat meant that the troubled Aljunied-Hougang-Punggol East Town Council (AHPETC) would become the Aljunied-Hougang Town Council (AHTC), with Punggol East joining with PAP Punggol-Pasir Ris Town Council. This added a new dimension to the protracted AHPETC dispute.

The WP had trouble appointing a suitable accounting firm as had been directed by the High Court on the governance troubles (Toh, 2016), with lawyers from the Housing Development Board (HDB) disagreeing with the candidates that WP had put up for consideration. The WP was directed by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon to "appoint a team of qualified accountants from one of the 'Big 4' accounting firms... within 2 weeks" (Channel NewsAsia, 2016f).

On March 1, AHTC Chairman Pritam Singh announced that KPMG had been appointed as the town council's accountant (Channel NewsAsia, 2016g). Ever since that date, the AHTC's website has published KPMG's monthly reports and tracked the number of issues resolved. At time of writing, they had yet to resolve all issues. These monthly reports would detail numerous control failures on the part of AHTC which KPMG in its report for July 2016, described as "pervasive, cutting across the key areas of governance, financial control, financial reporting, procurement and records management over the course of five years" (KPMG LLP, 2016a).

The July report was met with acceptance and acknowledgement on the part of AHTC (Singh, 2016), but with ire by others including Minister of Law, Shanmugam saying that it was a "damning litany of highly irregular and suspicious financial practices, poor governance structures and extensive leadership failures" (Shanmugam, 2016).

On November 1, the AHTC released KPMG's report on improper payments. The report said that "failures in governance at AHTC exposed millions of dollars in public funds to improper use and application, and could amount to criminal conduct if deliberate" (Lee P. , 2016a), although the audit firm stated that its role was not to "identify potential criminal acts" (KPMG LLP, 2016b).

One example cited was the conflict of interest between FM Solutions and Services, of which six shareholders also held appointments in AHTC. WP Secretary-General Low Thia Kiang responded by saying that the report did not "draw any new conclusions beyond what the Auditor-General's Office found in February last year" (Lim Y. L., 2016a). AHTC also disputed parts of the report, saying that it "acknowledged lapses in finance management, but denied there was a "significant lack of oversight" over its managing agent" (Heng J. , 2016b).

The KPMG report led the Ministry of National Development and HDB to ask AHTC to recover improper payments, saying: "To protect residents' interests, steps must be taken to recover the monies which have been lost, and to ensure that those who acted wrongfully are held to account" (Yong, 2016c). On November 13, it was reported by *The Straits Times* that AHTC had "agreed to appoint a third party to recover improper payments" (Lee P. , 2016b). The recovery of these improper payments would be an "uphill task" for AHTC and WP (Yong, 2016d). Singapore Management University law don Eugene Tan commented that the town council would have to "determine the extent of questionable transactions in order to recover any money paid erroneously" which would by definition be difficult "given its lack of discipline in record-keeping and financial operations."

Auditor-General's Report

On July 26, Singapore's Auditor-General's Office (AGO) released its report for the Financial Year 2015/2016. In it the AGO observed that six ministries and six statutory boards had, in a number of instances, "inadequate financial controls over Government operations". Furthermore, "there were cases of inadequate controls resulting in loss of revenue to the government" (Channel NewsAsia, 2016h).

Examples of these lapses included under-collection of tolls by the LTA at border crossings to Malaysia (Ng K. , 2016), the over-paying of Volunteer Special Constabulary; as well as the construction of a bin centre by the National Arts Council at the Victoria Concert Hall that cost nearly \$900,000 (Yahoo News, Singapore, 2016).

The WP issued a press statement on August 1 saying that the "multiple lapses in public sector spending and governance flagged in the Auditor-General's Office... are 'matters of grave public concern' and should be adequately addressed by the government" (Perera, 2016a).

Senior Minister of State for Finance Indranee Rajah told Parliament on August 16 that the lapses “stem from individual officers not following procedures”, and did not “reflect systemic weakness”. Actions had been taken to remedy the lapses, and while Singapore was not perfect, the AGO’s report reflected a “transparent and accountable” system (Yong, 2016e).

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Changes to the Elected Presidency

On January 27, PM Lee said in Parliament that the government would put forward significant alterations to the NCMP and NMP schemes. He also outlined three aspects of the system of the EP that he would appoint a Constitutional Commission to study and make recommendations on. They were, first, the qualifying process for presidential candidates, specifically whether the eligibility criteria for such candidates should be updated and if so how; second, the framework governing the exercise of the presidential custodial powers, including whether the views of the CPA should be given more weight; and third, ensuring that minorities have the chance to be elected to presidential office from time to time (Lee H. L., 2016c).

A nine-member Constitutional Commission was announced on February 9, and was chaired by the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon (Sim, 2016a). The Commission invited written submissions from the public, with a deadline of March 21 (*Today*, 2016a).

Shortly after this, on March 10, former MP and Presidential Candidate Tan Cheng Bok announced that he intended to contest the next presidential election due to be held in 2017, a move seen by some as an attempt to pre-empt the changes to the system and question the legitimacy of the changes if a previous candidate like him could no longer qualify after the changes (Henson, 2016).

Over 100 written submissions were sent to the Commission. Out of this, 20 contributors were invited to make oral representations. Of these, only one, the WP, declined to appear, having written in their submission that they intended to debate the issue in Parliament instead. The WP’s written submission advocated the abolition of the system of EP; that its powers be returned to the Parliament, and a nominated, ceremonial president be reinstated (Sim, 2016b).

The participants at the public hearings, which was held in four sessions between April and May, were drawn from a mix of civil society groups, such as human rights group MARUAH and community associations like the Eurasian Association, as well as academics and private citizens (Channel NewsAsia, 2016i). The issue of minority representation took prominence during the public hearing, with many groups offering a wide range of opinions on the matter, such as returning to the appointed presidency system to a rotating “Group Representative Constituency”-style presidency, a reserved election for minority candidates; and leaving the system as it was.

The public hearings also raised questions of whether the current qualifying criteria were too strict or if they needed to be strengthened, the lack of gender diversity and others pertaining to the CPA and the Presidential Elections Committee.

The Commission completed its report in August, and released it publicly on September 7. It proposed that if no candidate from one of the three major Singaporean racial groups — Chinese, Malay, as well as Indian and Others as a combined third category — had not been elected as president for five terms, the subsequent election would be reserved for a person of that group, on the condition that there is a qualified candidate from that racial group (Driscoll, 2016).

It also proposed tightening the eligibility criteria: previously candidates from the private sector had to be either chairman or CEO of a company with \$100 million paid up capital which was then changed to candidates on this private sector track needing to have been the most senior executive of a company with \$500 million shareholder equity (Driscoll, 2016). Regardless of whether the candidate was from the private or public sector, they would be required to have held the qualifying position for six years, previously three, no more than 15 years ago.

Changes to the “size and structure of the CPA” were also suggested, giving the CPA “greater weight in a clash between the President and the government”, by requiring the president to consult with the CPA on all fiscal matters and public service appointments before exercising his veto (Driscoll, 2016). It was also proposed that the CPA be expanded from six members to eight, with the president and prime minister each nominating one additional member. The Commission also recommended changes to how there can be an override of the presidential veto over the use of past national reserves and appointments, the office’s key residual executive powers (Ministry of Communication and Information, Singapore, 2016).

The Commission stepped outside the terms of reference that it had been given to consider “separating the custodial and ceremonial roles of the president”, returning to an appointed presidency system, and suggested that the custodial role could be handled differently if the question of deeper reform ever arises (Hussain, 2016a). They suggested an appointed council of experts, with less power than the current president, thus removing the need for them to be elected.

The government responded by saying that it accepted the report in principle, with Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Teo Chee Hean describing the report as “comprehensive and thoughtful” (Chew, 2016a).

On September 15, the government published a White Paper in response to the recommendations of the Commission, which differed in some aspects from the Commission’s proposals. For private candidates, the required tenure would remain at three years, rather than an increase to six (Chew, 2016b). The candidates would be allowed to aggregate qualifying tenures, and would qualify as long as any part of their experience fell within 20 years of the election, as opposed to entirely within 15 years. The White Paper also differed on the details of how a presidential veto might be overridden by Parliament, with the government preferring to retain the current two-thirds majority threshold.

The White Paper also provided information on Articles 5A and 5(2A), provisions that set out the conditions under which Parliament may alter the president’s powers, a provision that has been suspended since the EP system took effect (Yong, 2016f). The government said it would implement a “two tier” system to entrench the powers of the EP with the first tier relating to the EP and its powers, and the second tier relating to how the EP system operates. Eventually, changes to the first tier could entail a public referendum, while changes to the second tier would only require parliamentary approval. In both tiers, the exact level of approval needed would be determined by the president’s and CPA’s approval.

The changes to the Constitution were made official by Parliament on November 9, with the government confirming that 2017 would be the first reserved election for members of the Malay community (Channel NewsAsia, 2016j). PM Lee told parliament that the government had taken the Attorney-General’s advice, and would begin “counting from the first President who exercised the powers of the Elected President”, Dr Wee Kim Wee. Defining Dr Wee as Chinese; Mr Ong Teng Cheong as Chinese; Mr S R Nathan, who served two terms, as Indian; and Dr Tony Tan as Chinese; this would mean that five terms had elapsed without a Malay

President, making the forthcoming 2017 Presidential Election due to be a reserved election for Malay candidates (Lee H. L. 2016d).

WP's Senate Proposal

The WP was opposed to the EP system and did not support the changes. NCMP Dr Daniel Goh suggested that the government was concerned with the possibility of the presidency being a “second centre of power in the country” and was motivated by the close margins of the 2011’s presidential election (Goh, 2016a). The WP proposed instituting an elected Senate, and return the president to its previous, entirely ceremonial position. The WP’s chairman and MP Sylvia Lim said that the changes should not be decided by Parliament alone, and said it was “proper to consult the people directly in a national referendum” (Lim S. , 2016a).

This was rejected by the government, with Minister of State Janil Puthuchearu saying that the WP issued its senate proposal at “the last minute”, labelling the proposal as “extraordinarily radical” (Cheong, 2016). Minister for Education Ong Ye Kung said that the WP should instead propose its Senate idea as part of its manifesto in the next general election (Md, 2016).

Changes to the Non-Constituency Member of Parliament Scheme

On January 27, PM Lee said that his government would propose that the maximum number of NCMPs would be raised from nine to 12; and that NCMPs would be given the same voting powers as ordinary Members of Parliament (Lee H. L., 2016c).

The NCMP scheme’s stated purpose was to ensure a minimum level of opposition presence in a Singaporean Parliament long been dominated by the governing PAP. The scheme was first implemented after the 1984 General Election, and the NCMP was restricted from voting on constitutional amendments, money bills and no-confidence votes.

The PM’s proposed changes came amidst debate over WP candidate and former MP for Punggol East Lee Li Lian rejecting her NCMP seat, with the WP nominating Dr Daniel Goh in her stead. The changes which took place alongside the changes to the EP system were eclipsed by the latter (Lay & Tan, 2015).

Low, WP Secretary-General, a long-time opponent of the NCMP scheme said that the NCMPs were like “duckweed on the pond”, without the benefit of the roots that tied elected MPs to their constituency (*The Straits Times*, 2016b). In his opinion, this limited their ability to be effective parliamentarians. This interpretation was contested in Parliament, with Government whip Chan Chun Seng accusing the WP of denigrating NCMPs.

WP NCMP Leon Perera, in debate over the NCMP (and EP) changes in November, spoke against the NCMP scheme saying that it would not “play the balancing role that a healthy democracy” needed, and that NCMPs could not “use public facilities or draw on the Peoples Association’s lavish resources to fund grassroots activities in the wards they contested.” Pre-empting the question of why he chose then to take up the NCMP seat despite these concerns, he said that choosing between rejecting or accepting the seat was not clear cut, ultimately he had “decided that being in Parliament and arguing for what I believe is right outweighed the risk of damage to our politics from accepting this NCMP position” (Perera, 2016b).

The WP’s orientation towards the NCMP scheme – the appointment of Daniel Goh

As the new NCMP changes were being announced, the WP was in the process of replacing former Punggol East MP Lee Li Lian with Associate Professor Daniel Goh as one of the WP’s three NCMPs. Lee had lost her seat in the 2015 general election to Charles Chong of the PAP,

and had decided to decline the NCMP seat, citing a wish to spend more time with her family (Chong Z. L., 2016c).

On January 15, the WP filed a motion in Parliament to have the NCMP seat offered to Lee declared vacant and for Goh to take it up (Lim S. , 2016b). A/P Goh contested the East Coast GRC with current NCMP Leon Perera. Up to two NCMPs may originate from the same GRC team. The PAP's Grace Fu, who is the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, as well as the Leader of the House, commented on January 18 that the WP would have to move their motion through Parliament in order to have A/P Goh take up the NCMP, and warned that such a move should not be taken lightly by the WP (Chong Z. L., 2016d).

WP Secretary-General Low Thia Kiang commented, in response to the previously mentioned expansion of the NCMP scheme, that NCMPs were akin to “duckweed”, which Goh framed as a difference between Low's mainly Chinese speaking background and the Anglophone audience that it was presented to (Goh, 2016b).

PAP MPs however found the comparison to be disparaging to the NCMP scheme, with Government Whip Chan Chun Sing saying that the PAP MPs “would never call NCMPs ‘duckweeds’ as they are valuable members of the house” (Chew, 2016c). Ultimately the PAP supported the motion that allowed for Goh to take up the final NCMP seat, but with an amendment to the motion. The amendment stated that Lee had, in giving up the NCMP seat, acted “contrary to the expressed will of voters”, and characterised the WP's attempt to replace her with Goh as a “political manoeuvre”, one that took full advantage of the NCMP scheme while their “secretary-general criticises NCMPs as just ‘duckweed on the water of a pond’” (Chew, 2016c). The WP MPs voted against this amendment, and ultimately chose to abstain from their own motion in protest.

Ultimately, Goh would be sworn into Parliament on February 29 (Chong Z. L., 2016e). Upon learning of his appointment, Goh said, in comments that would be echoed by Perera in November, that in the short term, he considered the NCMP seat to be a form of “national service”, which ultimately would trump “political principle” (Goh, 2016b).

Bukit Batok By-Election

On May 7 a by-election was held in Bukit Batok Single-Member Constituency (SMC). It was contested by K. Muralidharan Pillai, commonly referred to as Murali, of the incumbent PAP against Dr Chee Soon Juan of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP). In the event, the PAP candidate won 61.2% of the vote, with the SDP candidate secured 38.8%. The by-election was triggered when on March 12 the SMC's MP David Ong from the PAP resigned from the party and from being an MP on account of an extramarital affair (Kwang, 2016).

Bukit Batok was carved out of Jurong Group Representative Constituency (GRC) before the 2015 General Election (GE) when Ong beat the SDP's Sadasivam Veriyah 73% to 26.4% (Siow, 2015).

On March 21, the PAP announced that litigator K. Muralidharan (“Murali”) Pillai would return from working the ground in Aljunied GRC to contest in the SMC where he had previously spent 16 years doing party and grassroots work. He had contested in Aljunied GRC in GE2015 as part of the PAP team that lost the contest to the incumbent Workers' Party members by less than 2 percentage points (Lee P. , 2016c).

The day before, on March 20, the SDP confirmed that its Secretary-General Chee would be its candidate in the as yet unannounced by-election. Dr Chee had previously unsuccessfully contested the Holland-Bukit Timah GRC during the 2015 General Election (Goy, 2016).

After the Budget debate in Parliament in March and April, President Tony Tan issued the writ of election on April 20. Nomination day was April 27 and Polling Day, May 7 (Channel NewsAsia, 2016k). The PAP would hold two election rallies, on April 29 and May 5. The SDP would hold four election rallies on the same days as the PAP as well as May 1 and 3.

Issues

The PAP's campaign was two-tiered. Murali focused his campaign on local issues, offering plans and suggestions for neighbourhood development to the tune of \$1.9 million; establishing a health co-op open to all, to provide affordable daily consumable items; a pilot programme aimed at the SMC's recently retrenched (Heng, Tan, Baharudin & Tan, 2016).

The SDP announced on April 10 that it had assembled a transition team to ensure that the handover of Bukit Batok's town council would be without issue if the party were to be "so fortunate as to be elected to run the... constituency." The transition team, filled with professionals from relevant fields such as facilities management and law, were meant to help with the initial transition and were slated to continue to be available to assist after that period (Siau, 2016).

On April 22, the SDP also announced four social initiatives it would implement for Bukit Batok if it won the ward: Subsidised private tuition for students from lower income families; a financial advice and planning programme; a legal clinic; as well as a programme that would include a trust fund to help the constituency's elderly poor with food vouchers and stipends, as well as pairing worse off families with better off households (Lim J. Q., 2016). As noted in a Mothership.sg article, some of these plans mirrored existing programmes in the constituency, put in place by outgoing MP David Ong (Ng Y. S., 2016).

There was a fair amount of sparing when it came to national issues. When Chee spoke about introducing an unemployment insurance to be funded by the government, he also spoke about low job creation statistics released by for 2015. The was refuted by Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam during the PAP's final rally, claiming that Chee had failed to recognise that nearly 35,000 jobs had been created for Singaporean citizens by government agencies in 2015, saying that Chee had either failed to do his "homework" or was "wilfully spreading fear and alarm", and citing it as an example of "bad politics" (Heng J. , 2016c).

Chee had also criticised immigration policy in the wake of arrest of eight Bangladeshi workers on terrorism charges at the time, stating that "we need to pay a lot more attention on people who come onto our shores", asking if the large numbers of people allowed into Singapore were properly vetted. This earned him a rebuke for Minister of Law and Home Affairs, K Shanmugam, saying that Chee's comments show a "lack of understanding of the problem" (*Today*, 2016b).

By far the most contentious issue not directly related to local Bukit Batok issues was that of "gutter politics". The SDP's Dr Paul Tambyah had spoken to DPM Tharman on Nomination Day and said that the DPM had promised a "clean campaign" (*Today*, 2016c). But by April 30, both parties felt that any such promises had been breached by the other side (Sha, 2016a). The main reason for this were comments made at the first rally on April 29 by both parties.

Speakers for the SDP at the rally referred to how to David Ong's indiscretions and departure were indicative the way PAP had cheated or broken their promises to the people. On the other hand, Chee said he would not "kick a man [Ong]" when he was down, despite political advice to do so; presumably trying to take the higher road on the issue (Sim, 2016c). PAP speakers for their part would bring up Chee's history, including heckling the then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in 2001, and the manner in which he became the SDP's leader (by ousting former

leader Chiam See Tong) as well as his lack of employment experience, asking voters if he had the competence to manage a town council (Cheng, 2016).

This would set the scene for the next week of campaigning, with claim and counter-claim about hypocrisy, lack of character and “gutter politics”. PAP Secretary-General, PM Lee accused Chee of getting “your guys to say all the bad things” about David Ong to look “benign” and “magisterial” by saying that he would not attack Ong (Au-Yong, 2016a). Chee responded by saying that a speaker may have “cracked a joke” about Ong, but Chee had told his party that such attacks were not acceptable (Lim Y. L., 2016b). Chee then went on later in the campaign to refer to a social media spat between the PM and his sister, Dr Lee Wei Ling, claiming that he had steadfastly refused to use it as political ammunition, while in fact doing so in the speech (Lim Y. , 2016). In the course of the campaign, a group of artists and civil society activists announced at an SDP rally that they had launched a petition on Change.org against the use of “gutter politics” (Sha, 2016b).

However, there was to be a final twist just before Cooling-Off Day. Lina Chiam, wife of Chiam See Tong, from the Singapore People’s Party, issued a statement on Facebook clarifying that the use of a photograph of Chee and Chiam See Tong together in an SDP newsletter that was being circulated online was no endorsement of the Chiams for the SDP campaign. The news made its way into mainstream newspapers on Cooling-Off Day (Lim Y. L., 2016c).

Aftermath

Both parties claimed that the election result was a good one.

On the PAP’s side, while Murali was voted in with 61.21% of the vote, while Chee received 38.79%. This was a diminished margin of victory for the PAP, when they defeated the SDP 73.02% to 26.4%, with an independent candidate receiving the rest of the vote. However, it had beaten the “by-election” effect where it is usually assumed that the PAP would not be returned when voters have a chance to select an opposition politician, when the result would not affect PAP’s position as the governing power (Kwang, 2016).

For the SDP, Chee praised the “tremendous job” performed by his team despite having “so few resources” and having to cope with what he believed was a biased media. He said the result “did not feel like a defeat”. It was his best electoral showing ever, and he vowed to maintain his interest in Bukit Batok (Kotwani & Ong, 2016).

Worker’s Party Leadership Contest and Party Renewal

On May 29, the WP held its Conference of Organisers where party cadre elected members of its Central Executive Council (CEC). The incumbent Chairman, Sylvia Lim, and Secretary-General, Low Thia Khiang were re-elected. It was revealed that the incumbent Treasurer, Aljunied GRC MP Chen Show Mao had challenged Low for leadership of the party, the first challenge since Low became Secretary-General 15 years ago. Low won the contest with 61 votes to Chen’s 45, with Low abstaining from the vote (Au-Yong, 2016b).

Participating in the party election for the first time were 28 new party cadres, included just prior to the conference. The leadership challenge was a surprise to observers who were looking for indications of more evolutionary change and succession planning (Tan M. , 2016). Veteran journalist PN Balji suggested it reflected a difference of approach to managing the party — with Low favouring a traditional, grassroots-oriented approach and Chen favouring one that would have WP be more active and vocal in Parliamentary debates (Balji, 2016). Reporting by *The Straits Times* suggested that some within the party felt that Low had “mishandled the Aljunied-Hougang-Punggol East Town Council saga”. It was also suggested that the

introduction of new cadres was a direct response to the possibility of a leadership challenge (Chong Z. L., 2016f).

At the CEC's first meeting a week after the election, Aljunied GRC MP Pritam Singh was named the party's Assistant Secretary-General (ASG), a post that had not been filled for 10 years. Observers noted that Low himself had been ASG prior to become Secretary-General. Political scientist Bilveer Singh suggested that this made Pritam Singh a frontrunner to the role of Secretary-General even though it was no guarantee. It was noted that Aljunied MP Faisal Abdul Manap was appointed Vice-Chairman as well (Lim Y. L., 2016d).

In addition, newer CEC members were appointed to roles that indicated they were being groomed for leadership: Kenneth Foo, leader of the WP's Nee Soon GRC team in the 2015 General Election was appointed Deputy Organising Secretary, NCMP Leon Perera appointed Deputy Chairman of the media team and NCMP Dennis Tan, appointed Deputy Treasurer (Y. L. Lim, 2016d).

Chen stood down from his role as Treasurer in September, which led to speculation that he had resigned or quit the party. Neither Low nor Chen would comment at the time (Chong Z. L., 2016g). However, Chen later clarified in a Facebook post that his term had expired as was intended when he was re-appointed Treasurer in June. Chen remains a member of the CEC while Dennis Tan took over as Treasurer (Lay, 2016).

Health-Related Events of Note

There were four major health events related to key leaders in 2016. The previous President of Singapore S R Nathan passed away on August 22. Minister of Finance Heng Swee Keat suffered a stroke on May 12, PM Lee took ill while delivering the National Day Rally Speech on August 21, and MP for Punggol East Charles Chong underwent a liver transplant.

The Death of SR Nathan

On July 31, former President S R Nathan suffered a stroke (Channel NewsAsia, 2016l). He had previously suffered a stroke in April of 2015. Mr Nathan was taken to the Singapore General Hospital's Intensive Care Unit, where he would remain until his death. Mr Nathan was accorded a state funeral, and his body lay in state in Parliament House for two days. Mr Nathan had also served Singapore as Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and as Ambassador to the United States, to name but a few of his contributions (*Today*, 2016d).

Mr Nathan's passing elicited condolences from all corners of Singapore, as well as international leaders (*The Straits Times*, 2016c). Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong described Mr Nathan as "a man guided by a deep sense of duty to the nation" (Channel NewsAsia, 2016m).

Heng Swee Keat

Minister for Finance Heng Swee Keat suffered a stroke on May 12 during a Cabinet meeting (*Today*, 2016e). By May 13, Heng's condition was reported to be "stable" after being in a coma for six days (AsiaOne, 2016b). On August 21 during the National Day Rally, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced that Heng would resume some of his work in the Ministry of Finance, mainly to do with planning for the 2017 Budget, as well as his work with the Committee for the Future Economy (Lee H. L., 2016b).

While he was incapacitated, former Minister for Finance and current Co-ordinating Minister for Economic and Social policies Tharman Shanmugaratnam covered for Heng initially, while former PAP MP Sin Boon Ann stood in for Heng in grassroots duties (Ching, 2016). At the

NDR speech PM Lee revealed that Lawrence Wong, the Minister for National Development, would be appointed Second Minister for Finance to assist Heng with operational responsibilities at MoF (Lee H. L., 2016b).

PM Lee at the NDR Speech

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong took ill during the National Day Rally. Details are contained within that section of this document.

Charles Chong

While not part of the Cabinet, Member of Parliament Charles Chong, Deputy Speaker of Parliament and MP for Punggol East, underwent a liver transplant at the end of the year. He was on medical leave for eight weeks (Neo, 2016).

Security & Terrorism

Terrorism-Related Events

2016, much like the year before that saw a number of terrorist attacks of significant size all over the world. Because of this, the government continued to warn Singaporeans of the potential fallout not if but when Singapore suffers a terrorist attack. There was news of people being arrested for plotting acts of terror to be carried out in Singapore or in other countries.

The year started with the announcement that in the closing months of 2015, the Internal Security Department had arrested 27 men from Bangladesh who had been “planning to take part in extremist activities in other countries, including their homeland of Bangladesh” (Channel NewsAsia, 2016n). By May, eight more Bangladeshi men were arrested. While there was no indication that the men were specifically targeting Singapore, in the later arrest one of the men had indicated that he would “carry out an attack anywhere if he was instructed by ISIS to do so” (Hussain, 2016b).

In July, a Singaporean man, Zulfikar Mohamad Shariff, was detained under the Internal Security Act for terrorism-related activities. He was accused of using social media to spread an extremist agenda, and his social media writings had helped radicalise at least two Singaporeans. Zulfikar had moved to Australia in 2002 after what was called the “Tudung Affair” that year, but had travelled to Singapore in July in 2016 when he was arrested. The Ministry of Home Affairs said that Zulfikar’s agenda was to “provoke Muslims in Singapore into pushing for the replacement of the democratic system with an Islamic state in Singapore” (Lim Y. L., 2016e).

In August, it was revealed that a group of six Indonesian militants had set up a cell in the Indonesian island of Batam, across the Straits of Singapore, with the intention of launching a rocket at the Marina Bay Sands area (Lee & Lim, 2016). The group had worked with a “Syria-based Indonesian ISIS (Islamic State) militant”, and was stopped by the Indonesian authorities who had been coordinating investigations with Singaporean security agencies. Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean expressed his gratitude to Indonesian authorities, but also stressed the seriousness of the threat of terrorism to Singapore (Arshad, 2016).

In December, Catholic churches in Singapore were advised to increase security. This was partly in a response to incidents that had taken place overseas, such as attacks in Germany and the arrest of suspected terrorists in Indonesia and Australia (Chan, 2016).

As part of the effort to prepare for and respond to a terror attack, the government launched “SGSecure” earlier in the year. PM Lee spoke about the SGSecure program at his National Day Rally speech and was rolled out in late September. SGSecure includes a mobile app to allow people to receive alerts during emergencies as well as for providing information to the authorities (Chia, 2016).

The government’s key concern was expressed by Minister for Home Affairs and Law K Shanmugam when he asked: “Do we respond as one people and not point fingers at a particular community or a religious group, but respond as Singaporeans, understanding that most Singaporeans are moderate and inclusive? Then we have won, if life goes on as normal. If we go into our bunkers and start pointing fingers and become divided, then the terrorists win” (Chong Z. L., 2016h).

Media Affairs

TheRealSingapore Editors

Yang Kaiheng and Ai Takagi, formerly editors of The Real Singapore (TRS) website, were found guilty of sedition and sentenced to serve jail sentences of eight and 10 months, respectively, after pleading guilty (Lee P. , 2016d). The pair was slated to have been tried together, but Takagi pleaded guilty before the trial started and was sentenced in March, while Yang was sentenced in June (Chong E. , 2016). The pair were accused of publishing seditious articles on the TRS website, which prosecutors described as “made up stories ‘designed to provoke hatred against foreigners in Singapore’”, where “[o]ne article falsely reported that a Chinese boy had urinated in a bottle on the metro, while another accused a Filipino family of starting scuffles at a Hindu festival in 2015” (BBC News, 2016).

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