

Creative way to keep taxpayers in the picture **Iras to use illustrations on envelopes to show where tax dollars go to**

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Few, if any, will have good things to say about paying taxes.

But do you know where your money goes to?

The Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (Iras) is hoping that a series of illustrations on the back of five million envelopes mailed out this year will help taxpayers better understand what their tax dollars are used for.

The drawings, done by Republic Polytechnic student Vivian Ong, 19, are meant to depict what education, defence and public housing mean through the eyes of a young girl.

Said Iras director of corporate communications Deanna Choo: 'We wanted a creative way to inform taxpayers where the taxes go to, and also to thank them for their contributions so far, so we decided to use illustrations to convey this message.'

Iras' only criterion was that the illustrations should be kept simple. They left the creative aspect solely to Miss Ong, who was selected by her polytechnic to be part of the project.

The final-year student from the School of Technology for the Arts said that her drawings were motivated by manga, or Japanese cartoon and comics.

'Illustrations are a friendly approach to tell people why they have to pay taxes. The illustrations cannot be too dull or boring and must include some fun elements,' she said.

The illustrations centred on education, defence and public housing because they fall under the two main sectors of the Government's expenditure - the Social Development Sector and the Security and External Relations Sector.

Iras collected about \$29.9 billion in the 2009/2010 financial year. Taxes collected by Iras will form 76 per cent of the Government's operating revenue.

In 2009, the Social Development Sector formed the bulk of the government expenditure, accounting for \$18.1 billion or 41.5 per cent of government spending.

Some ministries under the Social Development Sector include Education, Health and National Development.

The Security and External Relations Sector, which comprises ministries such as Defence, accounted for \$14.9 billion or 34.3 per cent of the Government's expenditure in 2009.

Dr Gillian Koh of the Institute of Policy Studies said that the illustrations will give citizens a sense of how public funds are used.

'Citizens must trust, too, that all revenues channelled into the Consolidated Fund will be spent appropriately on a range of programmes,' said Dr Koh.

'It's not practicable to ask that revenue from car ownership be spent directly and only on roads, for instance.'

Singaporeans will receive the envelopes with the illustrations in three periods of the year. For this month, about 900,000 letters depicting how taxes are used for education will be sent out.

Batches with the second and third illustrations will be sent out in May and November respectively.

Lawyer Derrick Wong, 61, said that the project is a 'nice reminder' for Singaporeans.

He said: 'I am pleasantly surprised by the simplicity of the message that drives home the wholesome objective of why we all pay taxes.'