

## **The Gist: MPs discuss motion on supporting families, marriage and parenthood aspirations of S'poreans**

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SINGAPORE - In a debate lasting six hours on Feb 5, over 20 MPs called on the Government to review policies to better support families, as well as the marriage and parenthood aspirations of Singaporeans.

Topics raised included access to early childhood education, managing work and family commitments, and the costs of raising children.

Earlier in the day, MPs also asked how Singapore companies can benefit from the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone, and when the Government plans to review the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others race model.

Here are the key takeaways from the sitting:

### **Supporting Singaporeans to start and raise families**

A motion by MPs Hany Soh (Marsiling-Yew Tee GRC) and Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim (Chua Chu Kang GRC) called on the Government to review its policies, so Singaporeans starting and raising families get better support.

Issues raised included access to early childhood education, managing work and family commitments, and the costs of raising children.

The Government is committed to supporting Singaporeans in their marriage and parenthood journey, said Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Indranee Rajah, who threw her support behind the motion.

She outlined support measures such as subsidies for buying flats; support for raising children in the form of baby bonuses and education subsidies; as well as higher education and work-life support.

She also noted the availability of 30 weeks of paid parental leave by April 1, 2026, as well as caregiving options and flexible work arrangements. Pre-schools have ramped up infant care capacity, and major education reforms have taken place, she added.

### **Why it matters:**

Several MPs called for increased childcare leave and proposed measures to ease the financial burden of childcare, with the rising cost of housing and long waiting times for HDB flats also flagged as obstacles that impede starting a family.

For instance, Progress Singapore Party (PSP) secretary-general Hazel Poa said housing issues are a "key impediment" to raising Singapore's fertility rate, and urged the Government to more aggressively increase the supply of flats with shorter waiting times.

“We will continue to review and update our policies as called for by the original motion,” said Ms Indranee. She added that marriage and parenthood initiatives are expected to cost the Government close to \$7 billion in the 2026 financial year, up from over \$4 billion in 2020.

While a wide range of financial support is already available, she also said a new scheme for large families is on the way, with details to be announced in Budget 2025.

### **S’pore firms can use Johor-Singapore SEZ as manufacturing, processing base**

When the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ) is ready, the improved cross-border flow of goods and people will make it beneficial for Singapore-based companies to locate their manufacturing and processing operations there.

“Firms could benefit from siting some of their operations in Johor to take advantage of the resources there, while focusing HQ (headquarters) and research functions in Singapore, where we have relative strengths,” said Minister of State for Trade and Industry Alvin Tan.

He noted that many Singapore-based companies already have twinning operations in Singapore and Johor.

Eligible Singapore companies can seek support from schemes such as the Market Readiness Assistance Grant and Enterprise Financing Scheme, administered by Enterprise Singapore.

Malaysia has also announced incentives, including special corporate and income tax rates for qualifying investments.

### **Why it matters:**

Analysts said the JS-SEZ, an integrated zone for business and investment, is primed to create more jobs and business opportunities, while driving the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises.

The zone aims to support the expansion of 50 projects in the first five years, and 100 projects in 10 years.

But its success largely depends on whether projects will be implemented in a timely manner to attract investments and boost investor confidence, as well as cross-border economic connectivity between the two countries.

“If executed well, the Johor-Singapore SEZ will give (Singapore) that additional competitive edge,” noted Mr Tan.

“The final objective is to attract new companies, new investors who hitherto may not have considered Singapore as an investment destination.”

### **Removing CMIO race framework may result in problems**

Law and Home Affairs Minister K. Shanmugam said that removing the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) framework will result in the Government not being able to identify and address differences between racial groups, which may worsen outcomes.

The framework helps the Government administer race-based policies and programmes that promote social cohesion and identify those who need help, he said.

Citing the example of France, which banned the collection of race-based data from 1978, he noted that racial tensions remain, with a surge in race-related offences in recent years.

He was responding to a question from PSP Non-Constituency MP Leong Mun Wai, who had asked when the Government plans to review the CMIO model and what form such a review will take.

### **Why it matters:**

Mr Shanmugam's reiteration of the importance of the framework comes amid a long-running debate over its relevance, with some advocating its removal entirely.

Mr Shanmugam acknowledged that there is some truth to criticism that the framework is too simplistic and rigid for an increasingly complex and heterogenous society.

But he also noted that changes have been made over the years to keep it relevant, including allowing the registration of double-barrelled races in 2011.

The issue made headlines in January when Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Edwin Tong said at an Institute of Policy Studies conference that the model should be constantly reviewed to reflect Singapore's increasingly complex multicultural landscape, and acknowledged ongoing debate about whether it adequately represents the country's evolving identity.

Many policies, including the Ethnic Integration Policy for housing and group representation constituencies in politics, are built on the framework.

### **If you have a few more minutes:**

#### **Seats at more MRT stations with longer walkways**

There are plans to install seats in longer walkways at stations along two upcoming MRT lines, said Senior Minister of State for Transport Amy Khor.

"For the upcoming Jurong Region Line and the Cross Island Line, the Land Transport Authority is also planning for seats in longer walkways, both above and underground, to provide better comfort and convenience for commuters," she added.

At present, seats have been added along longer underground walkways at some stations, including Marine Terrace, Beauty World and Bukit Panjang MRT stations, based on passenger feedback.

The authorities plan to extend this to other stations, said Dr Khor.

She was responding to a parliamentary question from MP Henry Kwek (Kebun Baru) asking if seats can be installed in long underground tunnels at MRT stations as a means of respite for seniors and those with mobility challenges.

#### **Undesirable advertising practices outside schools**

The Ministry of Education (MOE) is [studying ways to discourage tuition centres from undesirable advertising practices](#) that prey on parents' anxieties, such as distributing fliers outside primary schools.

MOE does not support such practices, said Minister of State for Education Gan Siow Huang, who was responding to a question from MP Liang Eng Hwa (Bukit Panjang).

Mr Liang said he had observed such acts outside a primary school in his constituency on the first day of school in January.

Addressing concerns about increased spending on private tuition as indicated by the Household Expenditure Survey 2023, Ms Gan said parents in Singapore enrol their children in more enrichment classes or pricier tuition, hoping it will help them do better in their studies.

This is consistent with global trends, where wealthier parents tend to use their resources and connections to support their children's development, Ms Gan said, adding that MOE is not in a position to intervene in such personal decisions.