



The Year in Review: Policy and Political Developments in 2022

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Contents

POLICY DEVELOPMENTS	4
Emergence From COVID-19.....	4
Vaccination Strategy and Relaxation of Safe Management Measures.....	4
Impact of Reopening	5
Tourism	5
Economy	6
Healthcare.....	7
Government’s After-Action Review on Managing the Pandemic.....	8
Budget 2022	8
Announcement of GST Hike.....	8
Carbon Tax Adjustment.....	9
Support for Households and Businesses.....	9
Responses to Tax Policies and Support Measures	10
Workers’ Party’s Opposition to Tax Increases.....	10
Other Concerns	11
Support for Businesses and Households Amidst Supply Chain Disruptions	11
Labour Policies	12
Foreign Worker Policies.....	12
Lower-Wage Workers	12
Responses to Labour Policy Changes	13
Committee of Supply Debates.....	13
Building Resilience of Singapore	14
Sustainability	14
Strengthening Families.....	15
Well-Being of Singaporeans	15
War in Ukraine.....	16
Singapore’s Sanction of Russia.....	16
Global Energy Crisis	17
Inflation.....	18
MAS’ Forecasts.....	18
MAS’ Policy Responses	18
Concerns of a Wage-Price Spiral	19
Sustainability and Resilience	20

Sustainability.....	20
Green Bonds	21
Singapore Hydrogen Strategy.....	21
COP27	22
Carbon Credits	22
Food Resilience	23
Alternative Meat.....	24
National Day Rally Speech	24
Repeal of Section 377A and Amendment of Constitution on Marriage Definition.....	25
Parliamentary Debate	26
"Enduring Imperatives" Amidst Challenges.....	27
Healthier SG	27
Healthier SG White Paper	28
Challenges in Rolling Out Healthier SG	28
Housing Affordability.....	29
Rising Prices and Interest Rates	29
Record Net Deficit Incurred by HDB.....	30
Selective En bloc Redevelopment Scheme (SERS).....	31
Economic Developments	31
Singapore Economy 2030	32
Digitalisation.....	32
Cryptocurrency and Digital Asset Ecosystem	32
Bankruptcy of FTX.....	33
Digital Economy Agreements.....	34
Developments in the Technology Space.....	35
Online Scams.....	35
Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill	35
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT	36
Leadership Transition to 4G Prime Minister	36
Designation of Lawrence Wong as Successor	36
Forward Singapore: 4G Leaders' Public Engagement Exercise	37
PAP 37th Central Executive Committee	40
PM Lee on Opposition Parties in Singapore	41
Lawrence Wong's Speech	41
Workers' Party	41
Intra-Party Tensions From Raeesah Khan Saga	42
AHTC Appeal Judgement.....	42
Parliamentary Challenges by Opposition Parties	43
Progress Singapore Party (PSP).....	43
Drug Laws and Death Penalty	44
Challenges to Singapore's Death Penalty for Drug Traffickers	44

INTRODUCTION

This document provides a review of key policy and political developments in Singapore in 2022. The year was significant as Singapore transitioned fully from the pandemic to endemic phase in managing COVID-19.

With a further lifting of restrictions and opening of borders, the economy continued its rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic, although this was tempered by geopolitical crises such as the US-China trade war and Russia's invasion of Ukraine that compounded the stress on global trade and supply chains.

On a year-on-year basis, the Singapore economy in 2022 expanded by 4.0 per cent, 4.7 per cent, 4.2 per cent, and 2.2 per cent in the first, second, third, and fourth quarters, respectively. Early estimates by the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) suggested the economy grew by 3.8 per cent overall, in 2022, reflecting a slowdown from the previous year's 7.6 per cent. In MTI's forecast in November 2022 for 2023, Singapore's GDP growth rate is expected to slow further, to 0.5 to 2.5 per cent in 2023 (MTI, 2023).

Singapore's core inflation rose from 4 to 5 per cent in 2022, which was low compared with other countries. The International Monetary Fund (2022) estimated that the global inflation rate had risen from 4.7 to 8.8 per cent (IMF, 2022).

In the labour market, unemployment rates continued a downward trend in 2022. From the first to last quarter of 2022, the overall unemployment rate fell steadily from 2.2 to 2.0 per cent (MTI, n.b.d). As of December 2022, the resident unemployment rate had also fallen from 3.5 to 2.9 from 2021 to 2022; this was the same for the citizen unemployment rate which fell from 3.7 to 3.1 per cent (MOM, 2023).

The effects of the post-pandemic policies also manifested in population trends. Singapore's total population grew by 3.4 per cent from 2022, mainly in the non-resident segment. The resident population continued to age as the proportion of residents aged 65 years and older rose from 16.0 per cent in 2021 to 16.6 per cent in 2022. The resident old-age support ratio declined from 4.0 to 3.8 as at end-June 2022 (SingStat, 2022).

POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Emergence From COVID-19

Almost two years after Singapore's "circuit breaker" to curb the spread of COVID-19 in April 2020, Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong announced that Singapore was "ready to take a decisive step towards living with COVID-19" on March 24 (PMO, 2022a).

Vaccination Strategy and Relaxation of Safe Management Measures

The "living with COVID" strategy aimed to reopen the Singapore economy on the wings of the high vaccination rate achieved among the general population. This was in contrast to strategies of returning to pre-pandemic normalcy without a vaccination plan, or a COVID-zero strategy characterised by mass-testing, frequent lockdowns and quarantines.

By January 2023, 83 per cent of Singapore's eligible population had received minimum protection, having completed three mRNA or Novavax/Nuvaxovid doses, or four Sinovac CoronaVac doses (MOH, 2023). Various Safe Management Measures (SMMs) were gradually relaxed with the availability of vaccines from 2022. Beginning in March 29 in 2022, up to 75 per cent of an organisation's employees were able to return to workplaces, the number of patrons at large events were increased to 75 per cent of full capacity, and wearing masks outdoors became optional.

The eased measures were later applied to people who were unvaccinated. On October 7, the Multi-Ministry Task Force announced that the Vaccination-Differentiated Safe Management Measures (VDS) would be lifted three days later (MOM, 2022c). All the measures except the wearing of masks in healthcare facilities and public transport were lifted for the entire nation.

Cross-border travel also eased substantially. On April 1, the Vaccinated Travel Framework was launched to allow all vaccinated travellers to enter Singapore without serving a Stay-Home Notice (SHN) or applying for entry approvals. Non-fully vaccinated travellers were able to travel without restrictions only from August 28 (gov.sg, 2022a).

From the beginning of the year till October, when the vaccination-differentiated measures were in place, debates about fairness of these measures arose. In January, Bloomberg noted parliamentary replies from the Ministry of Manpower and reported that "Singapore workers who refuse vaccination risk losing jobs" (Chanjaroen & Low, 2022). The ministry's policy was such that unvaccinated employees could not sue for workplace discrimination if they were not allowed to return to their workplaces. An exemption was made for those certified to be medically ineligible for vaccination. In March, Non-Constituency Member of Parliament (NCMP) Mr Leong Mun Wai, representing the Progress Singapore Party (PSP), urged the government to "show its magnanimity" to those who refuse vaccination for "valid

personal reasons” (PSP, 2022a). He supplemented his argument with claims that VDS had been practised in schools in ways that were inconvenient and unfair.

The government maintained its position of mass vaccination being a key to minimising deaths associated with COVID-19. At a parliament sitting on October 3, Minister for Health Mr Ong Ye Kung revealed that as of June, about 2,100 exemptions were granted to those who were medically ineligible to be vaccinated. He stated that the number of people medically ineligible “is very small, given the choice of vaccines that they have access to” (MOH, 2022g). VDS were lifted in October when population-wide vaccination and infection rates reached sufficiently high levels. Even then, non-fully vaccinated persons were urged by Ministry of Health (MOH) to take precautions and minimise social interaction.

Towards the end of the year, records showed that reopening had brought the levels of coronavirus death and infections to higher levels than the previous two years. As of December 5, 878 deaths were attributable to COVID-19 in 2022, compared to 828 deaths in the first two years combined. A total of 1.89 million cases of infection were reported in 2022 alone, a huge rise from the 279,405 infections at the end of 2021. However, as Singapore’s mortality rate was still at a low 0.08 per cent, compared to the global rate of 1.03 per cent, the efficacy of the vaccination strategy was clear (Jayaram, 2022).

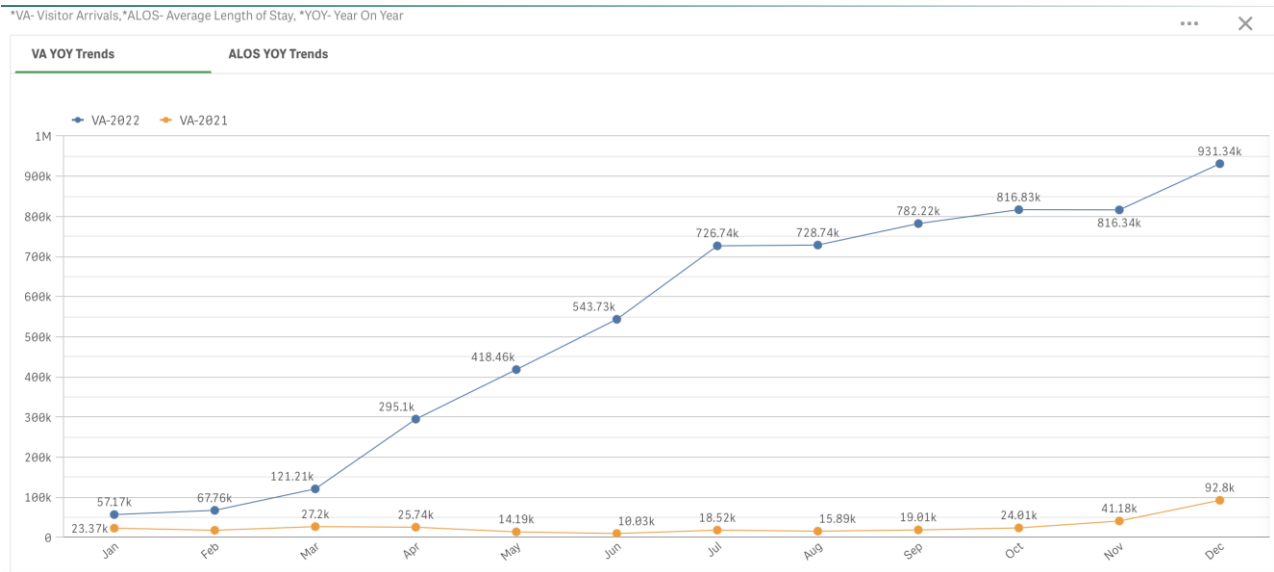
Impact of Reopening

Each step in the “living with COVID” strategy led to restoration of activities in every sector towards pre-pandemic times.

Tourism

In 2022, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) recorded 16.31 million international visitor arrivals. This registered a 1,810.5 per cent year-on-year increase from 2021 (see Figure 1; Stan, 2022a). As of September 2022, total tourism receipts amounted to S\$8.96 billion, at a 653.02 per cent year-on-year increase. The top-spending tourists were from Indonesia, followed by India, Australia, USA, Malaysia and China (Stan, 2022b).

Figure 1: Visitor Arrivals in 2021 and 2022



The STB was optimistic about a strong recovery in the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) industry. According to a media release on June 1, Singapore hosted more than 150 events from January to March 2022 alone, with at least 66 international events secured for the rest of the year (STB, 2022). In comparison, through the whole of 2021, Singapore had hosted just over 200 events.

The recommencement of the Singapore Grand Prix from September 30 to October 2 was a global signal that Singapore was “back in business”. After a two-year hiatus, the race drew a record crowd of 302,000, with about half being foreign visitors (Yong J. Y., 2022).

With the strong recoveries in these various sectors, the Singapore Airlines Group (SIA) also rebounded significantly. Singapore Airlines and Scoot were among the first carriers to launch services when restrictions eased in September and were successful in capturing the pent-up travel demand. SIA posted a record first-quarter operating profit of S\$556 million, which was the second-highest quarterly profit in its history (SIA, 2022).

Economy

The decisive reopening of the different sectors translated well in Singapore’s economic growth. The table below set outs the key economic indicators summarising the country’s performance in 2022. In every aspect, growth was particularly strong in the second quarter, which eased in the last two quarters albeit still recording a significant expansion from the year before.

Figure 2: Percentage Change of GDP Growth in 2022

	First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Fourth quarter
Overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	4.0	4.7	4.2	2.2
Goods Producing Industries	5.5	5.9	2.1	-1.3
Service Producing Industries	4.9	5.0	5.8	4.1

Observers such as those from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) noted Singapore's "impressive recovery from the pandemic" which is "outperforming similar economies" (IMF, 2022). Nonetheless, they were cautiously optimistic for the future, pointing to the difficult global environment in which Singapore is situated. MTI shared this sense of realism. In the opening speech by its Permanent Secretary Mr Gabriel Lim, MTI acknowledged that the weaker external economic outlook would weigh on the growth of Singapore's outward-oriented sectors. Taking the downside risks into consideration, MTI forecast a conservative growth rate of "0.5 to 2.5 per cent growth" in 2023 (MTI, 2022).

Healthcare

The decision to enter the new phase of post-pandemic normalcy hinged on the population's vaccination rate and the stability of the healthcare system. In November 2021, Senior Minister of State for Health Dr Janil Puthuchery explained that while hospitals were no longer operating at peak capacities, they were still strained with a stretched workforce (MOH, 2021). The toll on healthcare workers and threats to the stability of the system remained a concern.

On January 10, questions were asked in Parliament about the number of doctors, nurses and allied health professionals who had resigned. It was shared that 1,500 healthcare workers left in the first half of 2021, which was not a significant increase from pre-pandemic years. For example, overall resignation in 2018 and 2020 were 4,600 and 3,700, respectively. However, in another parliamentary sitting in August 2022, MOH revealed that there had been an overall increase in the attrition rates for local nurses, from 5.4 per cent in 2020 to 7.4 per cent in 2021. The increase, however, was more serious for foreign nurses in the public sector, where attrition rate rose from 7.0 per cent in 2020 to 14.8 per cent in 2021 (MOH, 2022e).

The well-being of healthcare workers continued to be an issue of concern, with the workers themselves urging change by sharing more about the realities on the ground. For example, an anonymous Instagram with the handle "@thehonesthealthcareworker" published an open letter to Minister for Health Mr Gan Kim Yong, claiming that the nurse-to-patient ratio was 1:12 instead of the one to four or five that had typically been reported. The post also mentioned "endless leave restrictions" that drove professionals to resign, leaving junior

doctors to attend to cases that were beyond their depth. Published in February, the post drew more than 18,800 likes (thehonesthealthcareworker, 2022).

In various open letters, speeches and answers in Parliament, the ministers did not dispute that years of pressure had taken a toll on healthcare workers. Different task forces and policies were established to explore ways to address the issues. For example, as part of the strategy to retain and stabilise the nursing workforce, MOH announced it would review the scope of nurses' work, especially to reduce the administrative workload through technological innovation. MOH cited the heightened global competition that drew nursing staff out of Singapore or at least out of the public sector. As such, the government had to keep remuneration schemes competitive. On July 29, Health Minister Mr Ong Ye Kung announced that nurses would receive an additional payment on top of their salaries in 2022 and 2023 to keep them in the profession. They were also set to get increases of 5 to 14 per cent on their monthly base salaries (MOH, 2022d). A National Wellness Committee for Junior Doctors (NWC-JD) was established to review and recommend changes to existing healthcare practices. The final recommendations are expected in early 2023 (Baker, 2022).

Government's After-Action Review on Managing the Pandemic

While new policies continued to be meted out in response to different needs, the government embarked on the process of reviewing how ordinary citizens responded to the pandemic. On July 5, 2021, Senior Minister of Coordinating Minister for National Security Mr Teo Chee Hean announced that an After-Action Review (AAR) would be conducted when the country is "in a new normal" (Parliament of Singapore, 2021). On May 9, as co-chair of the COVID-19 task force, Mr Lawrence Wong announced in Parliament that Mr Peter Ho, a former head of the civil service, would oversee the AAR. It was revealed that the process had begun and would focus on the first phase of the pandemic covering the period from start of the outbreak until August 2021 (Yeoh, 2022).

Budget 2022

Singapore's post-pandemic trajectory and the gloomy global outlook were the backdrop for Budget 2022. The budget statement was delivered by the Finance Minister Mr Lawrence Wong in Parliament on February 18.

Announcement of GST Hike

The most significant of the announcements were details to the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) hike, first publicly mooted in 2018 (Lam, 2018). Contrary to expectations, Mr Wong announced that the hike would be staggered in two stages — a rise from 7 to 8 per cent on January 1, 2023, and then to 9 per cent on January 1, 2024.

In the Budget speech as well as various online government platforms such as the “askMOF”, the GST hike was presented as an imperative to cover the projected rise in recurring expenditure on healthcare, pre-school education and security (MOF, 2019).

Carbon Tax Adjustment

Another significant policy change was in carbon tax, first introduced in 2019 at S\$5 per tonne of emissions. Mr Wong announced that this would rise to S\$25 per tonne in 2024, and then to S\$45 per tonne in 2025. According to the National Climate Change Secretariat (NCCS), the government did not expect to derive additional revenue from the carbon tax increase as the extra funds would be used to support decarbonisation efforts and cushion the impact on businesses and households (NCCS, 2022).

The amendment to the carbon tax rate would be made under the Carbon Pricing Act 2018 (CPA). Public consultation was conducted by the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment (MSE) from July 8 to August 5. The Carbon Pricing (Amendment) Bill was then tabled for First Reading in Parliament on October 3. On November 8, the bill was passed in Parliament.

Support for Households and Businesses

The adverse impact of increments in both taxes on households and businesses were recognised by the government. The Assurance Package (AP) and carbon tax-related transition framework were introduced to ease the transition and help Singaporeans cope with rising costs. Already introduced in 2021, a S\$6 billion Assurance Package for households was topped-up by S\$640 million. Another S\$1.4 billion was added to it in November, making it a S\$8 billion package that would provide transitional support for five years (Goh, 2022g).

The types of support Singaporeans would receive are summarised in the table below. Mr Wong said that more details on the enhancement of the package would be announced in Budget 2023 when further support for such as additional U-Save rebates could be expected.

Figure 3: Assurance Package (As of Budget 2022)

Type of pay-out	Amount
Cash pay-outs for Singaporean adults	S\$700 to S\$1,600
GST Voucher – Cash (Seniors' Bonus)	S\$600 to S\$900
GST Voucher – U-Save rebates for eligible HDB households	S\$330 to S\$570
MediSave top-ups (children aged 20 and below, and seniors aged 55 and above)	S\$450
Community and Development Council (CDC) Voucher	S\$400 over 2023 and 2024

As for the support for businesses, they would be allowed to use high-quality, international carbon credits to offset up to 5 per cent of their taxable emissions. Facilities in emissions-intensive trade-exposed (EITE) sectors would also receive transitory allowances.

Responses to Tax Policies and Support Measures

Workers' Party's Opposition to Tax Increases

On the first day of Parliamentary debates, opposition Members of Parliament (MPs) indicated their disagreement with the proposed GST hike. Leader of the Workers' Party (WP) Mr Pritam Singh said it “comes at a difficult time”, referring to rising inflation at the time. WP's position was that “the government need not raise the GST” and offered other options for raising revenue. They include introducing a wealth tax and adjusting the framework for the use of the long-term projected returns to the National Reserves (The Workers' Party, 2022a).

WP MP Dr Jamus Lim argued that the GST Vouchers (GSTVs) — an existing system of transfer payments from the government to low-income households to mitigate the otherwise regressive nature of the consumption tax — would not adequately cushion the impact of the GST hike. Drawing parallels to the COVID-19 Recovery Grant that would expire by the end of the year, he argued that poor households would still fall behind and suffer from the GST hike after the support measures ended. He also pointed out the travails of the “sandwich generation” that did not qualify for GSTVs and hence would have to bear the full force of the tax hike whilst supporting their aged parents and young children (The Workers' Party, 2022b).

Disagreeing with the WP proposals, Manpower Minister Mr Tan See Leng argued that these would place a growing burden on the middle class, which “is the surest way to unravel and destroy out social compact and trust in our society” (MOM, 2022b).

In his Budget round-up speech on March 2, Mr Lawrence Wong emphasised that consumption taxes could not be avoided as a way to ensure Singapore's tax revenue base remained diversified and resilient. He responded to Dr Jamus Lim's points and said that while the government tried to ensure that “the overall system of taxes and transfer is

progressive”, it did not mean that each and every tax scheme was progressive” (MOF, 2022a).

Other Concerns

Other than the challenges raised in Parliament, various stakeholders weighed in on the significant policy changes. For example, tax specialists from Grant Thornton Singapore raised concerns about the additional operational and transitional costs that firms would have to bear due to the two-step implementation of the GST hike (Grant Thornton, 2022).

Dr Jamus Lim challenged the framework of implementing a fixed carbon price, especially during a time of economic uncertainty. He instead proposed a central rate with a variable component that changed according to the conditions of the economy. Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Ms Grace Fu challenged the practicality of the suggestion and argued that such implementation would create uncertainties for companies, given that a host of exogenous factors could affect economic conditions (MSE, 2022c).

Further questions were raised during CNA’s TV programme “Ask the Finance Minister 2022”, which was televised on February 22 (CNA, 2022a). One of the concerns pertaining to the increase of carbon taxes was the price increases that consumers could face. When asked whether the government might step in to limit the extent to which companies could pass their costs to consumers, the minister replied that the right carbon price ought to be felt by everyone in the economy, both firms and consumers.

Support for Businesses and Households Amidst Supply Chain Disruptions

Charting the way forward with tax reforms, the Finance Minister also acknowledged that additional help was needed for firms that were still struggling from the economic fallout of the pandemic. The vulnerabilities of the global economy — such as continued pandemic-related risks and further supply-chain disruptions, were mentioned to explain the need to continue to support businesses and households.

For businesses, a Jobs and Business Support Package was announced. This was a S\$500 million package consisting of the Small Business Recovery Grant and Jobs Growth Incentive (JGI). Under the former, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in eligible sectors would receive a pay-out of S\$1,000 per local employee, capped at S\$10,000 per firm. The JGI was a salary support for employers to expand local hiring and was extended by six months to September 2022. In addition, other existing measures were extended to help firms cope with the spike in cost of materials and electricity, such as the Temporary Bridging Loan Programme and the enhanced Trade Loan Scheme, with revised parameters extended for another six months from April 1 to September 30. Project loans for the domestic construction sector were also extended for a year, from April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023.

For households, a S\$560 million Household Support Package was introduced. As part of the package, eligible HDB households would receive up to S\$500 GST Vouchers for the rest of 2022. S\$100 CDC Vouchers were also distributed to all Singaporeans. Finally, a top-up of S\$200 was committed for Edusave accounts of Singaporeans below the age of 21.

Labour Policies

Foreign Worker Policies

In terms of labour policies, amendments tightening the foreign worker market were announced. From September 2022, companies that employed foreign workers had to pay higher minimum salaries — at S\$4,500 to S\$5,000 for Employment Passes (EPs), and S\$3,000 to S\$3,300 for Special Passes (S Pass). Within the financial services sector, the figure for EPs was raised from S\$5,000 to S\$5,500. This was the third time Singapore had raised minimum salary requirements for EPs and S Passes in less than three years.

A new points-based Complementarity Assessment Framework was introduced, with implementation targeted for September 1, 2023. EP candidates would need sufficient points based on individual and firm-related attributes, such as whether they improve the firm's nationality diversity, in order to receive the pass to work in Singapore.

In the construction and process sector, adjustments were also announced as part of the effort to spur greater productivity improvements. From January 1, 2024, the Dependency Ratio Ceiling would be reduced from the current 1:7 to 1:5. The current Man-Year Entitlement framework would also be replaced by a new levy framework to encourage firms to support more offsite work and employ more higher-skilled work permit holders.

Lower-Wage Workers

In the Budget, the Finance Minister also announced new measures to protect and uplift lower-wage workers in Singapore. It was estimated that an average of S\$9 billion would be spent over the next five years for the enhanced Progressive Wage Credit (PWC) and Workfare schemes.

The PWC scheme would be extended to the retail, food services and waste management sectors. A new Local Qualifying Salary (LQS) of S\$1,400 would have to be paid by firms that hire foreign workers. From September 1, about 159,000 low-wage workers began earning at least S\$1,400 (CNA, 2022b). Lastly, a Progressive Wage Mark (PW Mark) would also be launched in the second half of 2022 to help consumers identify progressive employers easily. From March 2023, suppliers would need to be accredited with the PW Mark to qualify for government contracts.

To complement the progressive wage policy, the Workfare Income Supplement would also be enhanced. First, the pool of Workfare beneficiaries would be extended to cover those earning S\$2,500 a month, up from \$2,300 previously. The scheme would also be extended to younger workers aged 30 to 34. Second, the Workfare pay-outs would also be increased.

Responses to Labour Policy Changes

The efforts to introduce policies to support vulnerable groups were noted and welcomed by various representative groups and individuals. For example, the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) published a press release stating, “AWARE commends National Budget’s emphasis on vulnerable groups” (AWARE, 2022a). Contrasting the many critical views about the timing and manner of the GST hike, the group expressed appreciation that “the one-year delay and gradual raise [sic] of GST is a much-needed respite for households.” Nonetheless, they suggested that the Budget still lacked an “explicitly gendered lens” to “more efficiently and strategically offset gender inequalities.” They called for more attention to be given to the needs of marginalised women such as migrant spouses and domestic workers.

In an article published by *Rice Media* on March 23, gig worker John Lim expressed the view that the Budget had neglected the needs of gig economy workers when paying attention to lower-wage workers (Lim, 2022a). He urged for more provision for gig workers by making schemes like Workfare available to them and creating more incentives for them to make voluntary monthly CPF contributions.

This need to ensure platform workers attend to their retirement needs was addressed in November 2022. It was then announced that recommendations made by the Advisory Committee on Platform Workers were accepted by the government and would be implemented in the latter half of 2024. These include the mandating of CPF payments for taxi drivers, private-hire car drivers and freelance delivery workers, as well as mandating the provision of insurance coverage as set out in the existing Work Injury Compensation Act (WICA) (Yong C., 2022).

Committee of Supply Debates

The Committee of Supply (COS) debates took place in Parliament from March 2 to 11. The debates mainly consisted of questions filed about proposals in the Budget as well as details of initiatives that would have to supplement the announced measures. The new initiatives and policies detailed by the various statutory boards fall in one of four main themes: building resilience of Singapore, sustainability, strengthening families, and the well-being of Singaporeans.

Building Resilience of Singapore

With the aim of better preparing Singaporeans for the future, policies were reviewed and some changes were introduced in the COS speeches. As part of the effort to create space to build Singaporeans' "21st century competencies", the Ministry of Education (MOE) announced that mid-year examinations for all primary and secondary levels would be removed by 2023. The MOE would also launch a new SkillsFuture Career Transition Programme (SCTP) to support mid-career individuals in acquiring industry-relevant skills for moving into new sectors (MOE, 2022).

The need to prepare for the future was also reflected in the initiatives introduced by the Ministry of National Development (MND). Other than the above-mentioned changes to the foreign workforce policies in the construction sector, more initiatives were announced to accelerate the transformation of the built environment sector. It was announced that from 2022, all larger buildings must be designed in ways that require less manpower to construct. A S\$30 million grant was announced to support the facilities management sector with projects aimed at transforming the labour-intensity industry to a productive one with smart solutions (BCA, 2022).

Finally, the Smart Nation and Digital Government Group, under the Prime Minister's Office, shared plans to raise the country's digital capabilities. First, the Singpass app would see several enhancements with the introduction of more digital identity cards such as driver's license and digital practising certificates for healthcare professionals. From February 2022, the app was also made available in all four official languages. Second, the Smart Nation Ambassador Citizen Co-Creation Group was launched in January 2022 to improve digital inclusion. Diverse groups like seniors and low-income families provided feedback on the types of digital services they would benefit from, to help with designing such schemes.

Sustainability

On the big issue relating to sustainability and the environment, the MSE announced that the Public Utilities Board (PUB) had commenced the roll-out of the first phase of a programme in Tampines Central to install some 300,000 smart water meters on new and existing residential, commercial and industrial premises. These were targeted to be completed by 2023. To further support households and SMEs on the energy front, MSE also announced that the Energy Efficiency Fund's maximum grant support for investing in energy efficient technologies would be raised from 50 to 70 per cent, beginning on April 1.

The Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) expressed its commitment to environmental sustainability too, with its aim to reduce the growth of overall emissions by two-thirds between 2022 and 2030.

Finally, the Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) set out targets for data centres in Singapore. Under the Economic Development Board (EDB) and Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), a pilot Data Centre Call for Application Exercise (DC-CFA) was launched in July 2022 to support sustainable growth of data centres (IMDA, 2023).

Strengthening Families

The focus on the development of families also formed the basis of various new initiatives. The Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) announced that 2022 would be the Year of Celebrating SG Families.

A series of public engagements and projects were put in place to promote the theme of strengthening families. A new “Journey with You (JOY)” initiative was rolled out to support newly married couples. Here, MSF would partner with selected solemnisers to mentor newlywed couples in their first year of marriage (MSF, 2022a). The MSF and MOH implemented a five-year strategy and action plan to develop more targeted programmes focused on supporting mothers and their children (MOH, 2022a).

For its strategy of “Building a Singapore that is Made For Families”, the National Population and Talent Division (NPTD) introduced measures to support Singaporeans in starting and expanding their families. On November 2022, the MSF also published a 2025 plan for this, outlining existing and upcoming policies that would be implemented to support families (MSF, 2022b). For example, new funding support for certain pre-implantation genetic tests were announced. On the issue of flexible work arrangement, SMEs were encouraged to exercise greater flexibility and extend childcare leave where possible (NPTD, 2022). It was revealed that further enhancements to the Marriage & Parenthood support measures could be expected in 2023.

Well-Being of Singaporeans

Various ministries introduced initiatives targeted at improving the health and well-being of Singaporeans. The most comprehensive and transformative of these was the Healthier SG White Paper, which will be detailed in the later parts of this report.

On the physical health aspects, the MOH announced it would redouble its efforts to promote healthier lifestyles, such as through its sodium reduction strategy. Targeted health measures for specific sub-populations like the aged were also mentioned. These included plans to introduce a refreshed Action Plan for Successful Ageing, expanding housing-cum-care options, the “Live Well, Age Well” programme (MOH, 2022b), and establishing mental health teams for youths. An Enhanced National Addictions Management Service was introduced too.

Infrastructure-wise, MOH announced it had started to redevelop Alexandra Hospital and the Eastern Integrated Health Campus in 2022. Slated for completion by the end of 2027,

the former would be a new nursing home for residents with moderate to severe dementia (Ng K. G., *The Straits Times*, 2022a).

War in Ukraine

While the Budget had included measures to anticipate a gloomy global outlook, the pivotal geopolitical crisis of the war in Ukraine only occurred after the Budget announcement, when Russia launched its military invasion on February 24.

Singapore's Sanction of Russia

Singapore's response to the war was decisive. On February 25, Singapore joined 81 other countries in supporting a draft resolution passed by the UN Security Council to condemn Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The resolution was ultimately not passed after being vetoed by Russia. On March 2, a total of 141 countries including Singapore voted to adopt a resolution demanding Russia to end its military operations in Ukraine immediately.

The more significant response was Singapore's swift decision to enforce sanctions against Russia. On March 5, a press statement was released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) detailing the actions that Singapore would take which included export control and financial measures targeted at designated Russian entities (MFA, 2022b). Amongst ASEAN countries, Singapore was the only country to have imposed sanctions. Japan and South Korea were the only other Asian countries to do the same (Reuters, 2022).

Observers had noted the significance of this action, pointing out that Singapore's last unilateral sanction was imposed in 1978 when Vietnam invaded Cambodia to overthrow the Khmer Rouge (Li, 2022). Singapore's strong stance against Russia aroused concern among Singaporeans on social media outpourings. However, an independent Blackbox Research poll found that 95 per cent of the 1,711 Singaporeans interviewed sympathised with Ukraine. Editor-in-Chief of *The Straits Times* Mr Warren Fernandez also noted that it was "older, Chinese-educated Singaporeans" who "appear[ed] more likely to voice concerns about the wisdom of being seen to be hitching Singapore's wagon onto the US and the West" (Fernandez, 2022). He also interviewed Senior Minister Mr Teo Chee Hean, who explained that the sanction was in line with Singapore's "clear and consistent" positions over the years. As Coordinating Minister for National Security, Mr Teo explained that the strong stance was necessary to emphasise that Singapore took Russia's violation of the United Nations Charter that upheld the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty of member states seriously. In a ministerial statement made on February 28, Foreign Minister Dr Vivian Balakrishnan acknowledged that Singapore had "rarely acted to impose sanctions on other countries in the absence of binding Security Council decisions or directions" (MFA, 2022a). He added that it was imperative that Singapore "stand[s] up for principles that are the very foundation for the independence and sovereignty of smaller nations", to prepare for the possibility that such rights be called into question in Singapore's case one day.

Global Energy Crisis

One of the most direct and widespread implications of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis was the increase in energy costs across the globe. Although an energy crisis was already looming with the post-COVID pandemic recovery, it was made worse with Russia cutting supplies to EU as part of its war strategy. Before the war, Russia had supplied 40 per cent of EU countries' demand for natural gas. This figure dropped to about 17 per cent by August 2022 from the pressure to resist tapping imports from Russia (Horton & Palumbo, 2023).

The impact of these global supply chain disruptions were evident in Singapore. From March to May 2022, the average monthly uniform Singapore energy price (USEP) was more than S\$300/MWh. In the last three years, the average price had been just below S\$100/MWh (EMA, 2022a).

Although Singapore has a fully liberalised energy market, the government intervened to support companies and consumers through the effects of disrupted supplies. These steps were planned in anticipation of the energy supply crunch that was expected with the post-COVID recovery. In general, the Energy Market Authority (EMA) had set out three main groups of measures (Avinash, 2022).

First, there was direct intervention where a standby LNG facility was set up for power generation companies (gencos) to tap when supplies are disrupted (EMA, 2022b). Second, the gencos were specifically directed to maintain sufficient fuel for power generation to ensure stability in the electricity market. The EMA pre-emptively allowed the gencos to generate electricity using gas from the standby LNG facility, should there be potential shortages in the market. Finally, the EMA also introduced the Temporary Electricity Contracting Support Scheme, which allowed large consumers to sign up for fixed price contracts with participating gencos to reduce large consumers' exposure to market volatility.

For longer-term measures to protect consumers, Second Minister for Trade and Industry Dr Tan See Leng revealed on March 3 that the EMA would review the existing regulatory and licensing framework for electricity retailers (Parliament of Singapore, 2022a). This was mainly in response to the exit of six electricity retailers between October and December 2021 that had no requirements to compensate their consumers. In an article by The Home Ground Asia, the writer linked the exits of the retailers to the vulnerabilities of Singapore's liberalised energy market, which were exposed to external shocks from global disruptions (John, 2022). In a parliamentary sitting on November 9, Minister of State for Trade and Industry Ms Low Yen Ling assured the public that while reviews to existing system were being carried out, "the electricity market will largely remain liberalised and competitive" (Parliament of Singapore, 2022f).

On March 7, with specific reference to the effects of the Ukraine conflict, Trade and Industry Minister Mr Gan Kim Yong acknowledged in Parliament that strains to supply of oil, natural

gas, commodities and wider goods were to be expected. Singapore's had to adopt a "multi-pronged strategy" of diversifying imports, stockpiling, producing locally where viable, and working with retailers to ramp up supply from alternative sources to achieve resilience (Parliament of Singapore, 2022b).

Inflation

With the supply crunch on various fronts, soaring prices and inflation came to characterise the year of 2022. The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) had been at the forefront of tracking and adjusting Singapore's monetary policies to cope with these inflationary pressures.

MAS' Forecasts

In past years, MAS had typically released two monetary policy statements that revealed their inflation forecasts — one in April and another in October. In 2022, four such statements were released — in January, April, July and October. The table below summarises the changes in inflation forecast in each statement, reflecting the volatility of the global environment.

Figure 4: MAS Inflation Forecasts for 2022

	January 2022	April 2022	July 2022	October 2022
MAS Core Inflation Forecast for 2022	2.0–3.0%	2.5–3.5%	3.0–4.0%	3.5–4.5%
CPI-All Items Inflation Forecast for 2022	2.5–3.5%,	4.5–5.5%	5.0–6.0 %	5.5–6.5%

MAS' Policy Responses

Beginning in October 2021, MAS responded to external shocks by tightening its monetary policy. It was among the earliest central banks in the world to do so when the level of global inflation was still modest. Between March to November 2022, the United States' Federal Reserve System (Fed) raised its federal funds rate six times, bringing it from 0.25 to 4.00 per cent. Differing from the Fed and most other central banks, MAS uses the nominal exchange rate instead of interest rate as the intermediate target of monetary policy. The table below summarises all the approaches taken by MAS in taming inflation.

Figure 5: MAS Monetary Policy Responses in 2022

	Monetary Policy
October 2021	Rate of appreciation of the S\$NEER* policy band to be raised slightly from zero percent previously. Width of policy band and level at which it is centred remains unchanged.
January 2022	Rate of appreciation of the S\$NEER policy band to be raised slightly. Width of policy band and level at which it is centred remains unchanged.
April 2022	Rate of appreciation of the S\$NEER policy band to be raised slightly. Mid-point of the exchange rate policy band at the prevailing level of the S\$NEER to be re-centred.
July 2022	No change to slope and width of S\$NEER policy band. Mid-point of the exchange rate policy band to be re-centred to its prevailing level.
October 2022	Steps taken were the same as announced in July 2022.

* Singapore Dollar Nominal Effective Exchange Rate

As noted in a CNA report, the last time the central bank deployed both policy steps at the same time to tighten monetary policy was in 2010, when economies were emerging from the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (Tang, 2022a). The economic circumstances in 2022 that precipitated these aggressive moves brought attention to MAS' unique monetary policy approach that was explained in a parliamentary debate between Dr Jamus Lim and Minister of State for Trade and Industry Mr Alvin Tan on November 9. Mr Tan explained that MAS only targets exchange rates instead of the interest rate, given Singapore's open trade architecture (Parliament of Singapore, 2022f). He added that MAS' moves were estimated to have dampened core inflation by an average of 1.5 percentage point over 2022 and 2023. However, he noted that time was needed for the monetary policy effects to work through the economy. On a global scale, MAS' move on the exchange rate caused the Singapore dollar to strengthen and become one of the most resilient currencies against the fast-depreciating US dollar (Finnerty, 2022). Nevertheless, private sector observers were cautiously optimistic and pointing out that an overly strong Singapore dollar could hurt exports and negatively impact economic growth (Bowie, 2022).

Concerns of a Wage-Price Spiral

Another area that was a cause for concern despite the measures taken was the risk of a wage-price spiral. A wage-price spiral occurs when increased prices cause workers to demand for larger pay raises, which in turn pushes prices up further as the cost of higher wages are passed on to consumers. These concerns were reinforced with the large wage adjustments that were introduced in the public service.

On June 5, the Public Service Division (PSD) announced that about 23,000 civil servants would receive salary increases of between 5 and 14 per cent from August 1. The last time

salaries for civil servants were adjusted was in 2014 (Liew, 2022). On September 12, the PSD further announced that the salaries of administrative service officers as well as judicial and selected statutory appointment holders would be adjusted by 5 to 12 per cent from October 1. The MOE separately announced in August that 35,000 teachers would get pay increase of 5 to 10 per cent (Abdullah, 2022).

Although these pay increases had come partly as response to the rising costs of living, the PSD explained that the measures would also help the public service compete for talent and manpower, given rising attrition rates and the period since the last adjustment. Incidentally, on November 14, the National Wages Council also issued its wage guidelines for 2022/2023, where they recommended businesses to increase the gross monthly wage of employees by 5.5 to 7.5 per cent (MOM, 2022a).

During the media conference of the MAS annual report on July 19, MAS Managing Director Mr Ravi Menon acknowledged that the “risk of a wage-price spiral cannot be discounted.” Nonetheless, he assured that the risk is contained as “automatic wage indexation is rare in Singapore and the pass-through from prices to wages has been historically weak.”

Mr Menon stressed that the key to containing the spiral was to ensure that real wage growth did not exceed real productivity growth (MAS, 2022d). Associate Professor Terence Ho of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy echoed the importance of mitigating this risk by raising productivity through upskilling and reskilling workers (Ho, 2022). The National Wages Council’s guideline report also urged employers to implement a productivity initiative and called on workers to take “a proactive approach towards training to ensure currency of skills” (MOM, 2022a).

Sustainability and Resilience

The Russian-Ukrainian crisis and the supply chain vulnerabilities that it exposed accentuated the relevance of Singapore’s effort to ensure sustainability and resilience on many fronts. Singapore is one of the more than 70 countries that have committed to a net-zero emissions target by 2050.

Sustainability

In February 2021, the government unveiled the Singapore Green Plan 2030, a “whole-of-nation movement” to advance the country’s sustainable development agenda. Jointly led by the MOE, MND, MSE, MTI, and MOT to work towards the net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, it was a target that was confirmed by Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong on October 25, 2022.

On December 30, 2022, the MSE announced that it had appointed Singapore’s first Government Chief Sustainability Officer to drive the nation’s sustainability efforts. Mr Lim Tuang Liang, who had held the position as MSE’s Chief Science and Technology Officer,

would track the implementation of the Green Plan as well as other public sustainability efforts (MSE, 2022d).

Green Bonds

To achieve the net-zero goal through decarbonisation, the MOF confirmed its commitment to deepen Singapore's green finance market through the issuing of green bonds. On June 9, MOF and MAS published the Singapore Green Bond Framework that detailed the Singapore government's intended use of the green bond proceeds, the structure to evaluate eligible projects, the operational approach to manage the proceeds, and the commitment to post-issuance allocation and impact reporting. The green bonds offered in the year were in two main categories (MAS, 2022c).

The first was the inaugural 50-year Singapore Sovereign Green Bonds, named “Aug-72 bond”. From August 10, S\$50 million of the bond was offered for public application. The proceeds from the bond were slated to fund Singapore Green Plan 2030 expenditures, such as the building of two new MRT lines — the Jurong Region Line and Cross Island Line (MAS, 2022e). According to a report in *The Business Times* on August 11, over 1,720 applicants were fully allotted their bonds which were worth between S\$1,000 and S\$210,000 (Lim, 2022b).

The second was the Singapore Statutory Green Bonds, which include a pipeline of up to S\$35 billion in green bonds issued by various statutory boards. These bonds were first launched in August 2021 by NEA, which raised S\$1.65 billion through 10-year and 30-year fixed rate notes with 1.67 and 2.5 per cent coupon rates, respectively (Zhu, 2021). On March 16, HDB released its own green bonds which raised S\$1 billion (HDB, 2022b). Proceeds from these bonds were to finance several projects such as the Parc Residences@Tengah and Heart of Yew Tee integrated development. Finally, on September 2, the PUB raised S\$800 million in its inaugural green bond insurance. The proceeds were to fund green projects such as the implementation of decarbonisation solutions in Singapore's water plants (PUB, 2022).

Singapore Hydrogen Strategy

Another significant green initiative launched in 2022 was the Singapore Hydrogen Strategy. On October 26, MTI published a press release that identified and affirmed hydrogen as a sustainable alternative to fossil fuels. It stated that the government would help to develop capabilities in importing, handling and utilising low-carbon ammonia as a hydrogen carrier or directly as a fuel in power generation. On December 5, the EMA and Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) jointly released an invitation for interested parties to submit proposals to develop low or zero-carbon generators and solutions (MPA, 2022).

Speaking at the Singapore Energy Lecture on October 25, Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Mr Lawrence Wong said he expected Singaporeans to start having access to electricity

generated from low-carbon hydrogen from 2027. The longer-term goal was for hydrogen to supply up to half of Singapore's power needs by 2050 (Tan, 2022a).

COP27

The above-mentioned efforts and initiatives were made visible on the international stage, where Singapore affirmed its commitment to sustainability during its participation in the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27). The global conference took place from November 6 to 18 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt.

At the COP27 High Level Segment on November 15, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Ms Grace Fu delivered her national statement. The minister talked about Singapore's sustainability plans and collaborations, including the plan to raise Singapore's carbon tax.

COP27 also marked the year where Singapore had its first pavilion at the conference. The Singapore Pavilion was a partnership with over 100 stakeholders from corporates, media, academia and non-governmental organisations. Themed around "Building a Future of Green Possibilities", the pavilion showcased the country's plans and projects against climate change (MSE, 2022b). MAS' Managing Director Ravi Menon spoke at the pavilion's launch and focused on promoting Singapore's role in mobilising capital to help Asia achieve net-zero emissions (Tan, 2022b).

On November 20, COP27 closed with an agreement to provide a "loss and damage" fund for vulnerable countries that are hit hard by climate disasters. Governments agreed to establish a dedicated "transnational committee" to make recommendations on the operation of the fund at COP28 in 2023 (UNCC, 2022). The decision was well-received by observers, including Mr Kavickumar Muruganathan, a part-lecturer on environment economics at the National University of Singapore. Mr Muruganathan wrote a commentary arguing that Singapore's position as a financial and knowledge hub makes it "well-placed to represent the voices of Asia Pacific." More specifically, it was argued that Singapore is particularly able to represent ASEAN member states "on how the loss and damage fund should be structured and implemented for maximum benefit and positive climate impacts" (Muruganathan, 2022).

Carbon Credits

Carbon credits grew in salience as a tool for Singapore's decarbonisation efforts, in tandem with the hike in carbon tax announced in Budget 2022. Finance Minister Mr Lawrence Wong announced in the Budget statement that businesses would be able to use international carbon credits to offset up to five per cent of taxable emissions (Tan, 2022a).

On March 16, Singapore-based carbon exchange and marketplace Climate Impact X (CIX) was launched by DBS Bank, Singapore Exchange, Standard Chartered and Temasek. The

platform facilitates the trading of carbon credits for firms and governments (Tan, 2022b). On November 23, the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (IRAS) announced that it would waive GST on the issuance, transfer and sale of voluntary carbon credits supplied, with immediate effect. Representatives from CIX welcomed this as testament to the government's support for carbon markets (Wong, 2022b).

At COP27, it was announced that the National University of Singapore, together with the National Research Foundation, would commit S\$15 million to fund research on the use of carbon credits in Southeast Asia. Named "Carbon Integrity SG", the research would inform policy and investment decisions (Wong, 2022a). Also at COP27, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Ms Grace Fu announced that Singapore, along with the World Bank and the International Emission Trading Association, would launch the Climate Action Data Trust — an independent global market infrastructure that fosters transparency and confidence in carbon markets (Tan, 2022c). In October 2022, Mr Benedict Chia, Director-General of the National Climate Change Secretariat was appointed to sit on a United Nations body that oversees carbon credit trade, established in July 2022.

Food Resilience

In terms of sustainability, the issue of Singapore's resilience in food supplies also came under the spotlight in 2022. In May, Malaysia announced it would halt the export of live chickens to Singapore from July. The Malaysian authorities explained this was necessary because it was subsidising the cost of chicken feed, which had risen in price, to keep the livestock affordable for its people (Hassan, 2022). It stood to reason that Singapore should not be able to take advantage of this.

Local and overseas news entities reported on the anxieties and distress of Singaporean hawkers, restaurateurs and consumers that resulted from the ban (Heng, 2022). Various government agencies assured the public that "frozen chicken remains widely available". The Singapore Food Agency (SFA) increased imports from other countries such as Australia, Thailand, Brazil and Argentina (gov.sg, 2022b). On May 26, the FairPrice Group organised a visit to their Fresh Food Distribution Centre on Upper Thomson Road where its chief executive officer Ms Elaine Heng explained that it had a stockpile of frozen chicken that could last four months. At the same visit, Minister of State for Sustainability and the Environment Mr Desmond Tan reiterated that there was adequate supply of chicken in Singapore and urged people to refrain from panic buying (Goh T., 2022).

Malaysia's export ban lasted from June 1 until October 11. On December 4, *The Straits Times* published an article reporting that chicken sellers were seeing lower profits even after the ban had been lifted for seven weeks. Sellers who were interviewed said they were still unable to get the same number of birds as before and that the higher prices kept customers away (Woon, 2022). While the tightening of chicken imports from Malaysia did not result in widespread or long-term shortages, the sense of uncertainty and the hiked prices remained.

Geopolitical tensions around the world and the pandemic, which exposed the vulnerabilities of the world's food supply chains, also warranted greater effort to build up food security and resilience.

Alternative Meat

Back in 2019, the government had announced its “30 by 30” goal for Singapore to produce one-third of its local food needs by 2030, from the existing 10 per cent. Research and development in technologies was to be the main driver of this goal of bringing the number to a third (Chang, 2019). In 2021, a total of S\$23 million was dedicated to 12 research projects aimed at boosting Singapore's food security (Tan, 2021). In 2022, an additional S\$165 million in funding was allocated for similar purposes.

On October 26, the SFA published a media release revealing its key research areas, which included the development of novel foods and ingredients (SFA, 2022). There were several other initiatives that were in the same vein throughout the year. On June 10, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Ms Grace Fu attended GOOD Meat's groundbreaking ceremony for a S\$61 million research and development production facility in Bedok Food City. She stated that Singapore was the first country in the world to grant regulatory approval for cultured chicken meat in 2020 and continued to use bio-technology to expand the country's food options (MSE, 2022a). On November 21, it was also announced that the world's first hybrid meat innovation centre would be opened in Singapore in 2023. The centre would have a lab and kitchen to produce hybrid meats made by mixing cell-based meat and plant-based proteins. The target is to have these products ready for commercial use in local restaurants by 2024 and sold in supermarkets by 2025 (Begum, 2022).

National Day Rally Speech

From the emergence of COVID-19 to the crisis in Ukraine, significant challenges posed by the global setting shaped many new initiatives that were announced at Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong's annual National Day Rally (NDR).

On August 21, PM Lee delivered his speech and addressed the successful lifting of COVID-19 safe management measures, rising costs of living, ongoing geopolitical tensions, and the global contest for talent.

Amongst them, the most controversial was the announcement of the repeal of Section 377A of the Penal Code, which had criminalised sex between men. It was also announced that the Constitution would be amended to protect the heterosexual definition of marriage. This, it was later clarified by Minister for Law Mr K. Shanmugam that this would be a constitutional amendment that states that it is the preserve of Parliament to decide how marriage is defined.

As with previous years, PM Lee made three speeches — in Malay, Mandarin and English. In the Malay speech, directed mainly at the Malay/Muslim community, Mr Lee emphasised the sensitivity of the issue on Section 377A and the need to avoid disunity and division within the society. In the Mandarin speech, PM Lee gave more attention to the Russia-Ukrainian war — such as the government’s strong stance against the invasion and the concerns that Chinese Singaporeans had about broader US-China tensions.

Repeal of Section 377A and Amendment of Constitution on Marriage Definition

PM Lee presented the repeal of Section 377A of the Penal Code as the government’s move towards updating Singapore’s laws and practices “to reflect evolving social values and norms” (PMO, 2022d). He explained that the decision was made upon the advice of the Minister for Law and the Attorney-General, who evaluated that “there is a significant risk of s377A being struck down” in a future court challenge.

In a later interview with *The Straits Times*, Law and Home Affairs Minister Mr K. Shanmugam reiterated the rationale and argued that the government was doing “the right thing” by taking the step to align laws with social mores, and that “it would be irresponsible” for the government “to assume that the Courts won’t strike down s377A” (MHA, 2022a).

Minister for Social and Family Development and Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs Mr Masagos Zulkifli revealed that policies that “rely on the definition of marriage — such as public housing subsidies, financial benefits that favour married couples, higher age rating for media depicting non-traditional family units — would remain unchanged. Two laws in which the concept that marriage is between one man and one woman would underpin this. The first is the Women’s Charter in 1961, which protects the rights of women by legalising only monogamous marriages between a man and woman. The second is the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA), which provides the practice of Muslim Law to regulate marriage between Muslims. One of the requirements under AMLA is that marriage must be between a man and a woman (MSF, 2022c). This would reinforce the status quo and assuage the concerns that the repeal might “trigger wholesale changes” in national policy.

The move to amend the Constitution to ensure that the definition of marriage is the sole preserve of Parliament would allow for future generations to reform this and not have it become subject to a constitutional review.

Finally, it was mentioned by the Law Minister that workplace discrimination — either against LGBT persons or against those who did not agree with the lifestyle where these bear no relation to the actual work or job at hand — would not be condoned and would be subject to legislative action in the future (Lim, 2021). The government acknowledged that these steps required “political accommodation” among opposing groups on the matter (Sim, 2022).

Just before the NDR, on August 18 *The Straits Times* published an article about balancing the rights of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) and protecting the values of those with a traditional or conservative view on the nature of “family”. Authors Jason Wong and Mohd Khair argued that “it would be very unwise for the government to repeal Section 377A until and unless there are robust safeguards in place” (Wong & Mohd, 2022). The article drew the attention of pro-LGBTQ groups such as AWARE that expressed their disappointment through a Twitter thread. The group criticised the article as “misinformation” that articulated “spurious and hurtful claims” that LGBTQ activism is anti-family (AWARE, 2022B).

Following the two announcements made by PM Lee, it is no surprise that the battle lines between LGBTQ rights, marriage and family became more clearly drawn. BBC News titled its article “Gay marriage looms as new frontline in Singapore battle for LGBT rights”, and highlighted views of the government’s moves as a “pyrrhic victory” for the gay lobby, because the “constitutional amendment on marriage will ultimately hinder progress for LGBT rights” (Wong, 2022). A commentary published on the International Bar Association (IBA) webpage weighed the two moves and called it “a bittersweet victory” as the author believed there were still many obstacles for the LGBTQ community to attain rights and equality in familial relationships (Choo, 2022).

Some other reservations towards amending the Constitution arose from confusion about the legal terms and the substantive implications of the decision. In the above-mentioned interview with *The Straits Times* on August 23, Mr K. Shanmugam clarified the rationale, meaning and impact of the amendment to Constitution. The Law Minister explained that the specific definition of marriage as being between a man and woman would not be in the Constitution as some in the conservative camp had hoped; instead, legislative change would carve out the issue of marriage as one that should be determined by Parliament.

Parliamentary Debate

These concerns formed the backdrop of the debates in Parliament on November 29 when these reforms and two attending bills put to vote. On the bill to repeal Section 377A, 93 MPs voted for it, three voted against it, and none abstained. As for the bill to amend the Constitution to protect the definition of marriage from constitutional review, 85 MPs voted for it, two voted against, and two abstained.

One of the issues that overtook the debates on repeal was whether the political parties would lift the Whip for the vote. Leader of the Opposition, WP’s Mr Pritam Singh lifted his party whip to allow WP MPs to vote freely. MPs Dennis Tan (WP-Hougang), Gerald Giam (WP-Aljunied) and Faisal Manap (WP-Aljunied) spoke and voted against the repeal. In his speech, Mr Singh noted the PAP’s decision not to lift the Whip and expressed the concern of “a risk that the democratic value of Parliament could be diluted if the views of Singaporeans on this subject are not adequately ventilated in this House” (The Workers’ Party, 2022c). Mr Shanmugam responded to this comment by arguing that the Whip does

not prevent MPs from having and sharing their views, and that it was only relevant for voting on the bill. He counteracted Mr Singh's statements by saying that the opposition's lifting of the Whip had instead indicated that WP did not have an official position on the matter (CNA, 2022e).

On this debate, Associate Professor Eugene Tan of the Singapore Management University noted that it was rare for political parties, especially those in government, to lift their Whip for the simple rationale of needing to secure public confidence in their legislative agenda. He added that opposition parties generally had "the luxury of lifting its party whip because the political stakes for it are much lower" while allowing them to "appear to be bold and open-minded". Nonetheless, Associate Professor Tan reminded the public that the lifting the Whip is "not the point" when it came to understanding views around the decriminalisation of male gay sex and how the country works out a post-377A future that "does not descent into discord, division and a culture war" (Tan, 2022b).

"Enduring Imperatives" Amidst Challenges

Beyond the issue of gay rights, in his NDR speech PM Lee focused on domestic and international threats to Singapore that could polarise society — geopolitical tensions, anti-globalisation sentiments and online misinformation. He appealed for "a strong sense of national identity" to give "meaning to our nation building".

He highlighted three "enduring imperatives" that Singaporeans had to hold firm to: first, to strengthen Singaporeans' national identity and their understanding of where its national interests lie; second, to stay open and connected to the world; and third, to continue to build a world-class talent pool in Singapore by retaining and attracting top talents.

In his Mandarin speech, PM Lee referred to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and urged Singaporeans to "be psychologically prepared" and "stay united" should similar conflicts occur in Asia-Pacific. He explained that it was vitally important for Singapore's national interest to affirm its defence of the fundamental principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. He urged Singaporeans to be watchful against propaganda or misinformation disseminated on social media platforms that sought to stir up anti-American sentiments and erode trust in the government (PMO, 2022d).

Healthier SG

In line with anticipating and responding to major domestic and external challenges, the government launched a plan to reform the healthcare system of Singapore with the aim of managing the ageing population and its impact on the incidence of chronic diseases. During the MOH's Committee of Supply Debate in March 2022, a strategy called Healthier SG was announced. It was followed by a public engagement session which involved about 500 participants (Lim, 2022).

Healthier SG White Paper

On September 21, the government released a White Paper on Healthier SG, laying out the multi-year strategy to reform the healthcare system. The crux of the strategy was to shift the country's emphasis "from reactively caring for those who are sick, to proactively preventing individuals from falling ill" (MOH, 2022b). This would be achieved by anchoring Singapore residents with a family doctor for holistic and preventative personalised healthcare plan and by fostering community support for healthier lifestyles. Through it, Singaporeans who enrol with a family doctor will get, among others, fully subsidised recommended health screening and vaccinations. Participating general practitioner (GP) clinics would receive an annual service fee for the time and effort to manage each enrolled resident (Parliament of Singapore, 2022d).

In response to a question posed in Parliament, Health Minister Mr Ong Ye Kung shared that a centralised system had been established for residents to sign-up for Healthier SG and that the government preferred to encourage personal take-up instead of automatic enrolment (Parliament of Singapore, 2022h). He added that the progress and outcomes of Healthier SG would be monitored through outcome indicators in the short (1–3 years), medium (3–10 years), and long term (after 10 years). The short-term indicators would include screening rates for chronic diseases, active usage of the Healthy 365 app, and resident enrolment rates. As of October, Mr Ong revealed that the ministry was carrying out discussions with clinicians and other stakeholders to set out the technical definitions and the approach to measuring the outcomes (Parliament of Singapore, 2022c).

Challenges in Rolling Out Healthier SG

Considering these indicators, questions were raised in Parliament about what the existing data for various health indicators and specific targets for various population groups were (MOH, 2022f). The government revealed that a one-off grant would be given to family doctors to offset the costs of IT adoption to facilitate the sharing of data to monitor patient outcomes (Koh W., 2022). The importance of data — in delivering the goals of Healthier SG as well as in evaluating progress of the nationwide project, was emphasised in an article published on November 11 (IBM, 2022). Quoting the Ministry of Health's Deputy Secretary (Technology) Dr Cheong Wei Yang, author Rachel Teng highlighted that an ecosystem of data needs to flow seamlessly to support in-depth health studies (Teng R., 2022). An opinion piece from *The Business Times* also echoed that belief, that "embracing data sharing will be key to the success of Healthier SG" (Lai, 2022).

For the rest of year, other concerns about the implementation of Healthier SG were raised. On whether GP clinics would be overcrowded, the Minister for Health stated that a limit established by doctors to determine how many residents each GP could enrol in the scheme. On the manpower crunch in the healthcare system, Mr Ong revealed that it continued to attract young Singaporeans and that the attrition rate amongst local workers was not high. Given that the attrition rate among foreign nurses that had risen, measures

were being introduced to ensure jobs here were attractive (Parliament of Singapore, 2022c).

Housing Affordability

Post-COVID-19, another major challenge that governments around the world had to grapple with was rising property prices. Concerns over the affordability of public housing in Singapore were particularly palpable.

Rising Prices and Interest Rates

The debates on housing affordability were brought into stark relief when the media highlighted the cases of HDB resale flats that were sold at record million-dollar prices in 2022. The table below summarises the per-quarter changes in the HDB resale price index. The exuberant resale market was driven primarily by pandemic-related delays in the construction of build-to-order (BTO) flats. Also, HDB revealed that the number of unique first-timer (family applicants seeking new flats increased significantly, from 19,000 in 2018 to about 34,000 in 2021 (HDB, 2022c).

Figure 6: HDB Resale Price Index

	Index	Percentage change from previous quarter
2022 Q3	167.8	2.4%
2022 Q2	163.9	2.8%
2022 Q1	159.5	2.4%
2021 Q4	155.7	3.4%

Homeowners were anxious too as home loan rates rose with MAS' tightening of Singapore's monetary policies and the US FED's rate hikes. On October 4, local banks DBS, OCBC and UOB raised their fixed rate home loans to about 3.85 per cent. By November 15, all banks raised the rates to 4.5 per cent (CNA, 2022d).

According to the quarterly Real Estate Sentiment Index (RESI), senior executives of real estate firms became less optimistic about the overall real estate market in Singapore. In the third quarter of 2022, about 57 per cent of the surveyed developers expected unit prices of new residential launches to be moderately higher while 33 per cent believed they would remain at the same price levels.

To assuage concerns about rising unaffordability and the risk to prospective buyers from the volatile loans market, several policy interventions were introduced. First, HDB announced it would ramp up supply of BTO flats with the target of launching 23,000 flats per year in 2022 and 2023, in comparison with the 17,000 flats launched in 2021 (HDB, 2022d). To meet the rising housing demand from first-timer applicants, the MND and HDB announced on August 27 that the BTO allocation quota would be adjusted where more units in non-mature estates would be set aside for such applicants. For families, at least 85

per cent of the 3-room flat and 95 per cent of 4-room or larger flats would be set aside for first timers, higher than the prior proportion of 70 and 85 per cent, respectively. For singles, up to 65 per cent of the non-senior 2-room Flexi flats would be set aside for them, compared with 50 per cent previously (HDB, 2022c).

On September 29, the MAS, MND and HDB jointly announced a series of cooling measures, targeted at ensuring that home buyers borrowed within their means and thereby moderating demand in the property market. First, MAS tightened the criteria for qualifying for a loan granted by private financial institutions; and HDB raised the medium-term interest rate floor used to compute the total debt servicing ratio (TDSR) and mortgage serving ration (MSR) by 0.5 percentage point. Second, the loan-to-value (LTV) limit for HDB housing loans was lowered from 85 to 80 per cent so that buyers would borrow less for their purchases. Third, the wait-out period for private homeowners between selling their homes and buying a non-subsidised HDB resale flat was extended from six months to 15 months (MAS, 2022g).

During the PAP Party Conference held on November 6, PM Lee noted the growing concerns about housing availability and affordability and said that the measures would work but “take a while to show result” (PAP, 2022c).

Record Net Deficit Incurred by HDB

Amidst the many fine lines the government had to tread in housing policies, another announcement that gained the public’s attention was the announcement of the record net deficit HDB incurred in 2022. On October 31, HDB announced that it had incurred a record net deficit of S\$4.367 billion for the 2021 financial year. This was an 86 per cent increase from the S\$2.346 loss incurred in the previous year (HDB, 2022d). The announcement followed an earlier one on October 4 where HDB revealed it would incur a development loss of about S\$250 million from a BTO project in Ang Mo Kio. Of the S\$4.367 million, HDB revealed that S\$3.850 million was incurred for the home ownership segment, which stemmed from gross loss on flat sales completed and disbursement of CPF housing grants to eligible resale flat buyers.

Regarding the Central Weave @ Ang Mo Kio BTO project, former chief economist of GIC Private Limited Mr Yeoh Lam Keong published Facebook posts that suggested that HDB would not incur that S\$250 million loss. He cast doubt on the claim that the high deficit incurred was from the high estimated land cost of S\$500 million. Mr Yeoh asserted that the government was free to sell state land at normal or lower cost than the market value. The Online Citizen (TOC) picked up on the post and published an article headlined “Singapore’s reserves substantially profit from S\$500m land sales in AMK BTO”. Both Mr Yeoh and TOC were issued correction directions under the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) for the false statements (Cheng, 2022).

HDB published a short article titled “Does HDB profit from the sale of flats?” on its “HDBSpeaks” page to reinforce the notion that its deficits demonstrated HDB’s “commitment to ensuring that public housing remains affordable, accessible, and inclusive” (HDB, n.d).

Selective En bloc Redevelopment Scheme (SERS)

As part of HDB’s efforts to ensure sufficient and affordable supply of public housing, a new project was announced under the Selective En bloc Redevelopment Scheme (SERS) of Blocks 562 to 565 in Ang Mo Kio Avenue 3. This was after a four-year hiatus when the last SERS project announced was in 2018 in MacPherson. The Ang Mo Kio project would affect more than 600 households that were initially offered two rehousing options: the first was to buy a 2-room Flexi, 3-, or 4-room flat within a designated precinct in Ang Mo Kio; the second was to apply for a flat under BTO or Sale of Balance Flats (SBF) exercise, with SERS rehousing benefits (HDB, 2022a).

On July 3, a video circulated on Facebook showed emotional residents confronting Minister for National Development Mr Desmond Lee. The residents were not only upset about having to move away from a place which they had “emotional” attachments to but also about having to fork out S\$30,000 to S\$100,000 for replacement flats and made these sentiments known through various social media platforms (Return Our SG, 2022).

Enquiring about these sentiments, HDB responded to *Today* saying that it was exploring ways to help affected residents. The article from *Today* suggested the negative responses were probably due to the mistaken notion that SERS projects were “one-for-one exchanges” for a replacement flat. Quoting the views of property experts, the article pointed out that such expectations would not be logical since a replacement flat with a fresh 99-year lease would be valued far more than the homeowner’s existing flat (Choo D., 2022).

In June, it was reported that more than 40 residents started a petition appealing to the Prime Minister — who leads the group representation constituency for this SERS project — for a “more reasonable adjustment to the compensation amounts and pricing for the new flat (Choo D., 2022). On November 9, HDB announced that the affected households would receive compensation that would be 7.5 per cent higher than the initial estimates from April, and that this was due to resale market movements and the good condition of the flats (Ng M., 2022).

Economic Developments

Whilst adjusting policies in the social sphere, the government also unveiled plans and policies for growth in the economy.

Singapore Economy 2030

During the Committee of Supply speeches, MTI revealed specific targets of a special Singapore Economy 2030 plan, titled “Seizing Opportunities, Energising Enterprises”. On March 4, MTI Minister Mr Gan Kim Yong announced that his ministry would target growing exports from the S\$805 billion in 2020 to at least S\$1 trillion by 2030. Offshore trade was also targeted to double to US\$2 trillion over the same period.

Analysts welcomed the ambitions of the Singapore government but expressed caution about how realistic it was. Partner at EY Singapore Mr Goh Jia Yong identified three challenges Singapore had to overcome to do so: finding the right talent; enabling small enterprises to scale up and internationalise; and facilitating large-scale adoption of technology (Harper, 2022).

On September 14, the Enterprise Singapore shared specific plans to achieve the trade goals. They included the goal of diversifying Singapore’s trading network to have “every trading company in the world” in Singapore. This would involve looking beyond the “traditional markets” of the United States and China to those from emerging regions like Latin America and the Middle East. Another goal was to capture more re-exports and transshipment flows by having more regional distribution centres in Singapore (Enterprise Singapore, 2022).

Digitalisation

In his speech on Singapore Economy 2030, Minister Gan pointed out that sustainability and digitalisation will drive the next lap of growth for the services sector, which currently represent 70 per cent of Singapore’s economy (Subhani, 2022a). For the whole of the economy, other ministries are also orientated towards digitalisation through efforts in enhancing Singapore’s digital asset capabilities and ecosystem.

Cryptocurrency and Digital Asset Ecosystem

The government’s efforts towards building and promoting a digital asset ecosystem in Singapore in 2022 is notable. On May 31, the MAS announced the commencement of Project Guardian — a collaborative initiative with the financial industry to tap the economic potential and value-adding use cases of asset tokenisation (MAS, 2022b). The use of tokenised digital assets would enhance the efficiency, accessibility and affordability of financial services. On October 31, it was also announced that four trial projects would be undertaken to assess the use of a digital Singapore dollar by individuals, businesses and the government. The pilot programmes were led by MAS alongside DBS Bank, Grab, OCBC and UOB. Trial participants were able to use digital dollars to make purchases at participating merchants through various wallet applications (Subhani, 2022b).

Whilst the MAS' positive stance towards the general digital asset ecosystem was clear, observers were less certain in their reception of cryptocurrencies. At the Green Shoots seminar held by the MAS on August 29, Managing Director Mr Ravi Menon established their position — “yes to digital asset innovation, no to cryptocurrency”. He said MAS' aim was to make Singapore a tokenised economy, but through “stable” coins such as central bank digital currencies instead of cryptocurrencies which he warned to be “highly hazardous for retail investors” (MAS, 2022f). Nonetheless, MAS acknowledged that cryptocurrencies did play a supporting role in the broader digital asset ecosystem even if they were not suitable for investment and use by the general public.

On October 26, the financial regulator published two consultation papers proposing measures to reduce risks of consumer harm and support the development of stable coins as credible medium of exchange. The measures that cover three broad areas of consumer access, business conduct and technology risks had already been included into the Payment Services Act, which was enacted in 2019 to provide a framework for the regulation of payment systems in Singapore (MAS, 2022h).

Bankruptcy of FTX

On November 11, the volatility and risk of cryptocurrencies played out starkly with the collapse of FTX, the third-largest cryptocurrency exchange globally. Shortly after that, Temasek stated that its investment of S\$377 million investment in FTX would be written off. In a statement issued on November 17, Temasek clarified that the total cost of the lost investment was 0.09 per cent of its net portfolio value and it had no direct exposure in cryptocurrencies (Temasek, 2022).

In a Facebook post on November 26, former CEO of Temasek Ms Ho Ching stated that the decision to write down the investment in FTX was the right one. She defended the reputation of Temasek stating that some of its best investments had been made by being contrarian (Elangovan, 2022).

Discussions about Temasek and the failed investment in FTX drew differing opinions in online forums. In a Reddit post that had close to 400 engagements, most expressed disappointment about Temasek's risk management. Many commentators agreed that the loss was not significant for Temasek and acknowledged that it had made other profitable investments such as in Sea Ltd, which critics had not given it credit for (MicrotechAnalysis, 2022).

The Online Citizen (TOC) on the other hand published an article the following day that highlighted an investment which Temasek made in 2009, claiming that it had cost the “S'porean public more than S\$6b”. The anonymous writer ended the article with accusations that Temasek takes “huge risks” because “they are not investing in their own money but that of the Singaporean public” (TOC, 2022).

On November 30, 20 MPs raised questions about the impact of the investment loss and due diligence processes at Temasek as well as MAS. Finance Minister Mr Lawrence Wong gave a combined oral answer to all the questions on behalf of Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Minister-in-charge of MAS (MAS, 2022i). Mr Wong assured the house that the spill over from the FTX collapse into Singapore's broader financial system and economy was limited. On Temasek's investment, he noted there was no need for additional audit requirements or Parliamentary Committees as Temasek had already initiated an internal review by an independent team. He concluded by acknowledging that the FTX loss was "disappointing" but that risk-taking was part of the nature of investments.

Digital Economy Agreements

In 2020, the IMDA announced a new form of international agreements that Singapore would promote, called the Digital Economy Agreements (DEAs) aimed at establishing government-to-government cooperation in areas related to cross-border digital transaction (IMDA, 2020). They are "digital-only" agreements that establish trade rules and facilitate interoperability between two or more digital economies. According to the World Economic Forum, DEAs provides a "glimmer of hope" amidst rising digital protectionism and are particularly beneficial for SMEs that would benefit from consistent and interoperable digital regulations (WEF, 2022).

For background, the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA) was the first digital-only trade agreement open to all WTO members and was signed between Singapore, Chile, and New Zealand in 2020. The Singapore-Austria Digital Economy Agreement was signed in the same year on August 6. In 2022, two other DEAs were negotiated and signed. The United Kingdom-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement went in force on June 14, 2022. On November 21, 2022, the Korea-Singapore Digital Partnership Agreement was signed (MTI, n.d.a.). With these countries, Singapore adopted digital trade rules and norms that promoted more consistent, secure and seamless transactions in areas such as e-payments, paperless trading, cryptography and interoperability of digital identity regimes.

When negotiations with Korea were ongoing, the MTI and IMDA published an online survey for businesses to provide feedback on their needs in the digital economy. The survey asked questions relating to their understanding and perceptions of DEAs and challenges in areas such as cross-border data flow and data storage. This was to better understand local businesses in the midst of these ongoing initiatives to expand Singapore's network of DEAs (IMDA & MTI, n.d).

Developments in the Technology Space

Online Scams

The proliferation of digital technologies has also raised the threat of cybercrimes. It was revealed that a total of S\$660.7 million were lost to scam in 2022, up from S\$632 million in 2021 (*The Business Times*, 2023).

One of the most egregious cases had targeted OCBC customers in December 2021. By end of January 2022, a total of 790 people were reported to have fallen prey to the scam, with losses tallying at S\$13.7 million. The bank responded to the incident by introducing a slew of new security measures as well as making “full goodwill pay-outs” to all the victims (Kurohi & Low, 2022).

On January 19, MAS and the Association of Banks in Singapore (ABS) released a joint statement requiring all banks in Singapore to introduce more stringent measures to bolster the security of digital banking (Choo Y. T., 2022). Prior to that, MAS had announced it would consider supervisory actions against OCBC to identify deficiencies in their processes. During a parliamentary sitting on February 14, MPs filed questions about measures to help victims as well as ways to prevent recurrences of such crimes. On May 26, MAS announced that they had imposed an additional capital requirement of S\$330 million on OCBC after identifying deficiencies in the bank’s responses to the phishing scam. In June, there was a further set of measures issued which were aimed at strengthening “customers’ ability to protect themselves against digital banking scams” (MAS, 2022a).

The issue of online scams was debated in Parliament throughout the year. On November 8, the Minister of Home Affairs Mr K. Shanmugam was asked about the government’s ScamShield mobile app that was launched in 2020. The minister maintained that the app remained useful and that the various agencies were seeking to enhance it. Mr Shanmugam also revealed that from January 2023, the IMDA would adopt a mandatory SMS Sender ID Registry Regime or SSIR regime. This meant that all organisations using Sender IDs would be required to register their IDs with the SSIR. The SSIR would then work with SMS aggregators to block messages attempting to spoof the Sender IDs of the registered organisations (Parliament of Singapore, 2022e).

Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill

On the other aspect of cyber wellness and security, the government stepped up its efforts to protect the social media space. With the aim of tackling online harms, Minister for Communications and Information Ms Josephine Teo announced in March 2022 that her ministry would introduce new codes of practice requiring online platforms to have systems that would ensure safer online environment. On July 13, MCI launched a public consultation on the proposed measures, which concluded after receiving 600 responses. According to

MCI, parents were particularly concerned about dangerous content that their children might be exposed to.

On Oct 3, the Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill was introduced for its first reading in Parliament. Unprecedented in Asia, the bill would empower the IMDA to issue orders to social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube to take down harmful content such as those advocating suicide or self-harm, violence, terrorism and so on. The bill would make social media platforms liable for failure to protect local users from such harms (MCI, 2022). The second reading took place on November 8. Ms Teo closed the second reading by addressing questions from the MPs such as the possibility of extending the scope from social media to online gaming and whether private communications could be governed under the bill. The process of enforcement was also explained. It was then passed at the third reading, after unanimous support from the MPs.

Whilst support for the bill was unanimous, MPs' questions reflected concerns of the wider public. The practical difficulties of effectively enforcing the bill had been the main concern. In an article from the *South China Morning Post*, IPS Senior Research Fellow Dr Carol Soon acknowledged that regulating online content would be a "gargantuan task" given the "grey areas that are involved". NTU lecturer Jeremy Sng provided specific examples of how content that might be deemed harmful could be educational and helpful in other ways (Sim & Lim, 2022). The other difficulty was in trying to strike a balance between protecting safety of online space and infringing on freedom of expression. On October 13, AWARE expressed its support for the bill but also identified areas it had addressed like the specific target of children's online safety, the extent of platforms covered, and the training required for IMDA officials to handle the cases sensitively (AWARE, 2022b).

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Leadership Transition to 4G Prime Minister

The most significant political development in 2022 was the designation of Finance Minister Mr Lawrence Wong as the leader of the PAP's fourth-generation (4G) team and presumptive successor to the current prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong. This came in April 2022, a year after DPM Heng Swee Keat, who was previously identified for the role, announced he would step aside for a younger candidate.

Designation of Lawrence Wong as Successor

The designation was announced through a statement issued from the Prime Minister's Office on 14 April. It explained that PM Lee had asked former Cabinet Minister and former PAP Chairman Mr Khaw Boon Wan to engage ministers on who they felt was the best person to succeed PM Lee. Speaker of Parliament Mr Tan Chuan Jin and Secretary-General of the National Trades Union Congress and former minister Mr Ng Chee Meng joined Mr Khaw in the effort. They did not seek the views of PM Lee nor the two senior

ministers, Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam and Mr Teo Chee Hean. In the event, 15 out of 19 chose Mr Wong, with none of the other names garnering more than two votes.

On 16 April, PM Lee, Mr Wong and Mr Khaw held a media conference to elaborate on this selection process and its outcome. PM Lee acknowledged that the process was unconventional. This was due to the need for fresh consensus after Mr Heng's surprise decision to step aside. When asked, PM Lee said that no decision had been made about the date of the handover, and whether it would be before or after the next general election which was due only by November 2025 (PMO, 2022b).

On June 6, PM Lee announced a Cabinet reshuffle, promoting Mr Lawrence Wong to Deputy Prime Minister. Whilst continuing as Minister for Finance, he would also be Acting Prime Minister in the absence of the Prime Minister (PMO, 2022c).

The choice of Mr Lawrence Wong as successor was received without controversy. Speaking to CNA, SMU Associate Professor of Law Eugene Tan and Dr Mustafa Izzauddin from the Islamic World Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ICESCO), agreed that Mr Wong's leadership over the COVID-19 pandemic proved his capabilities to colleagues and the public (Mohan, 2022). In a survey carried out by IPS on Singaporeans' outlook towards the future, it was found that 57 to 60 per cent of respondents trusted that the government had the best possible 4G team of leaders to navigate through the post-COVID recovery (Mathews, Hou, & Pua, 2022).

Forward Singapore: 4G Leaders' Public Engagement Exercise

Following the confirmation of his position, DPM Wong launched the Forward Singapore exercise on June 28. This was to be a year-long nationwide engagement with Singaporeans on shaping and strengthening the social compact among citizens and between citizens and government. As an expression of Singaporeans' shared values and norms, the social compact would underpin the roles and responsibilities of the government, the community, businesses and individuals in society. In his speech during the launch of Forward Singapore, DPM Wong cited external trends of fractured societies, global inflation, rising geopolitical tensions, and the ageing population as reasons for the need for Singaporeans to refresh their social compact.

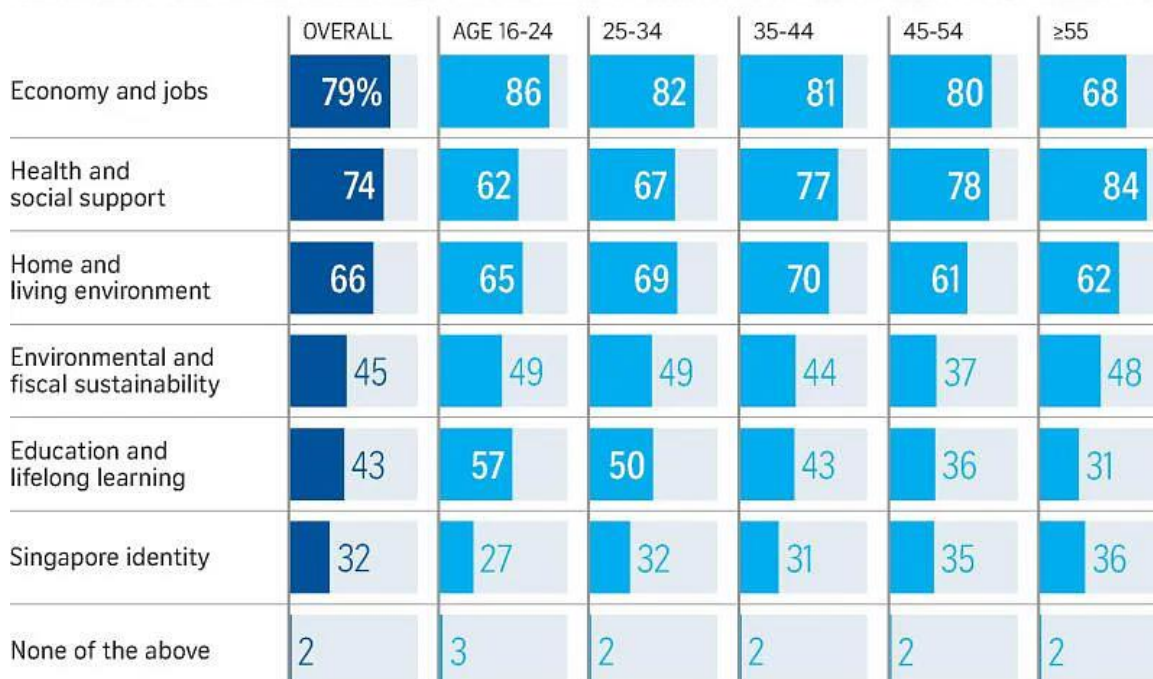
It was revealed that the engagements would take place under six pillars: empower, equip, care, build, steward, unite — each helmed by appointed 4G leaders. The tables below summarise the focus of each pillar and the leaders involved. DPM Wong also envisioned a refreshed social impact to weigh in on how the economy is to be run, how the system of meritocracy could be improved upon, how the system of social system could be strengthened, and lastly, how Singaporeans could cement their solidarity across generations (Our SG, 2022a).

The exercises would conclude with a report in mid-2023 setting out policy recommendations on how different segments of the society would better contribute to the nation's shared goals (Our SG, 2022b). On October 3, DPM Wong provided an update on the progress of the Forward Singapore exercise in Parliament. He said responses from Singaporeans had been encouraging and the teams had been working on three broad themes: creating more opportunities for Singaporeans; providing better assurance for Singaporeans in the face of an uncertain future; and strengthening Singaporeans' sense of solidarity as one people. He said the government also planned to invite citizens to co-develop and implement the policies instead of just having them share their views (Our SG, 2022c).

Figure 7: Six Pillars of Forward Singapore (MOF, 2022b)

Overall lead: Lawrence Wong, Deputy Prime Minister & Minister for Finance			
Pillar	Description	Pillar Leads*	
Empower: Economy and Jobs	To empower every Singaporean to have lifelong employability in a more competitive economy amidst an uncertain world.	Tan See Leng	Minister for Manpower & Second Minister for Trade and Industry
		Ng Chee Meng	Secretary-General, National Trades Union Congress
		Koh Poh Koon	Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Manpower & Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment
Equip: Education and Lifelong Learning	To equip every Singaporean with the opportunity to thrive, grow and realise their aspirations, regardless of their starting point in life.	Chan Chun Sing	Minister for Education
		Zaqy Mohamad	Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Defence & Ministry of Manpower
		Tan Kiat How	Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Communications and Information & Ministry of National Development
Care: Health and Social Support	To enable every Singaporean to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, and to better care for themselves and for others around them.	Ong Ye Kung	Minister for Health
		Masagos Zulkifli	Minister for Social and Family Development, Second Minister for Health & Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs
		Indraneel Rajah	Minister, Prime Minister's Office, Second Minister for Finance & National Development
Overall lead: Lawrence Wong, Deputy Prime Minister & Minister for Finance			
Pillar	Description	Pillar Leads*	
Build: Home and Living Environment	To transform our living environment, and to build a more liveable home for all who stake their futures here.	Desmond Lee	Minister for National Development & Minister-in-charge of Social Services Integration
		S Iswaran	Minister for Transport & Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations
		Josephine Teo	Minister for Communications and Information & Second Minister for Home Affairs
		Sim Ann	Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Ministry of National Development
Steward: Environmental and Fiscal Sustainability	To foster a more sustainable way of life that stewards our resources responsibly for future generations.	Grace Fu	Minister for Sustainability and the Environment
		Tan Chuan-Jin	Speaker of Parliament
		Chee Hong Tat	Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Finance & Ministry of Transport
Unite: Singapore Identity	To grow our sense of belonging to Singapore, our commitment to citizenship and our sense of mutual responsibility towards each other.	Edwin Tong	Minister for Culture, Community and Youth & Second Minister for Law
		Maliki Osman	Minister, Prime Minister's Office, Second Minister for Education & Foreign Affairs
		Janil Puthuchery	Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Communications and Information & Ministry of Health

On October 24, *The Straits Times* published the findings of an online survey it had conducted with 1,000 Singaporeans and permanent residents (Goh, 2022c). According to the survey, Singaporeans were most concerned about job security and healthcare costs among the six areas covered in the exercise. The issues to do with education, lifelong learning, environment and Singaporean identity were areas of concern for less than half the respondents. The figure below shows those survey results.

Figure 8: Survey Results by *The Straits Times***Top on minds of Singaporeans**

Source: MILIEU INSIGHT STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

PAP 37th Central Executive Committee

With the 4G team charting the future steps of Singapore, on November 6, the PAP held its biennial conference where elections were held for its Central Executive Committee. On November 26, the CEC announced the new line-up. DPM Lawrence Wong was appointed to a newly created Deputy Secretary-General post. It was explained that the Deputy Secretary-General would exercise the roles and responsibilities of the Secretary-General — now PM Lee — in the absence of the latter (PAP, 2022d).

Writing for CNA, IPS Deputy Director (Research) and Senior Research Fellow Dr Gillian Koh commented that the carving out of a unique position for DPM Wong “recognises that the PAP as well as Singapore is in an unprecedented situation.” There was a need to strike the balance between signalling that the leadership succession was well-settled after Minister Heng’s stepping down from the position in 2021, and not having to hurry the formal handover just for sake of keeping to previous timelines (Koh, 2022).

The CEC co-opted four members: Aljunied GRC’s Mr Alex Yeo, East Coast GRC’s Ms Cheryl Chan, labour leader Mr Ng Chee Meng, and Manpower Minister Mr Tan See Leng. Mr Heng Swee Keat was appointed as chairman with Gan Kim Yong stepping down from the position. National Development Minister Mr Desmond Lee was appointed to the position of Assistant Secretary-General alongside Education Minister Mr Chan Chun Sing. Both would be Assistant Secretary-Generals, and there would no longer be a distinction between First or Second Assistant Secretary-General.

PM Lee on Opposition Parties in Singapore

During the November 6 Party Conference, PM Lee addressed the 3,000-cadre party, focusing on the role of the opposition parties in Singapore. PM Lee described PAP's "unique challenge", that Singaporeans were satisfied with the PAP's governance but "also want to see more opposition MPs elected, to keep the PAP on its toes." He argued that this was a dangerous mindset as it weakened the mandate of the PAP and affected its ability to make decisions in crises such as the recent pandemic. A strong call for the party members to "win the political battle" followed. In tandem with this, PM Lee criticised the opposition parties for being "missing in action" when "spiky issues" such as the repeal of Section 377A surfaced (PAP, 2022c). He stated that strong governance included making difficult and unpopular choices.

Opposition party PSP's Secretary-General Mr Francis Yuen responded to PM Lee's remarks via his Facebook post titled, "How does one go 'MIA' [missing in action] when the debate has not even started?" Mr Yuen was referring to the debate over Section 377A, where PSP intended to explain its position on the issue during the parliamentary sitting. He added in the post that "it is disingenuous for the ruling party to make such sweeping remarks of the alternative parties" (Yuen, 2022). Online commentators, however, agreed with the sentiments of PM Lee. *The Straits Times'* coverage of PM Lee's speech was posted on discussion forum Reddit and drew more than 200 comments. The most popular comment that gathered about 460 likes expressed that PM Lee was "not wrong that the WP has been relatively quiet", and that the "nascent opposition still has the luxury of staying silent on such thorny issues" (cowbungaa, 2022).

Lawrence Wong's Speech

After PM Lee's speech, DPM Wong appealed to cadres for their "wholehearted support". He highlighted the domestic and international challenges of ageing population, inflation, US-China tensions and climate change that the PAP government would have to tackle. DPM Wong acknowledged the "established political force" of the Workers' Party and cautioned against the assumption that the PAP would win the next General Election and he would be the next prime minister. He urged the party to be prepared for "tougher and more uncertain elections" and to continue to build their engagements with citizens on online and in-person platforms (PAP, 2022c).

Workers' Party

Whilst the PAP had been careful not to underestimate the strength of the Workers' Party, the leading opposition party in Singapore also faced significant challenges over the year.

Intra-Party Tensions From Raeesah Khan Saga

In November 2021, former WP MP of Sengkang GRC Ms Raeesah Khan admitted to lying in Parliament. The highly publicised controversy carried into 2022 after hearings on the matter were conducted by the Committee of Privileges of Parliament in December 2021.

On February 10, 2022, the Committee issued its report, recommending to Parliament that the Ms Khan be fined S\$35,000, and WP's Secretary-General Pritam Singh and Vice-Chairperson Muhamad Faisal bin Abdul Manap be referred to the Public Prosecutor for further investigation and action. The recommendations were accepted following a parliamentary debate on February 15.

On February 28, 2022, *The Straits Times* published an article revealing interviews with anonymous WP party members. According to one of the cadres, members had differing opinions on how the matter had been handled by the party leaders, with some finding that "Ms Khan had been thrown under the bus by the party's leaders" (Tham, Goh, & Devaraj, 2022).

In a Facebook post published on September 3, Associate Professor Daniel Goh, who was a former cadre member of the opposition party and its NCMP between 2015 and 2020, revealed that the WP had set up a disciplinary committee to investigate his social media posts in 2021 about the saga. He had said that Ms Khan's resignation had left "many inconvenient questions" for the WP leadership unanswered. He also had a separate post stating that the party's leadership ought to take some responsibility for allowing Ms Khan's transgression to persist. According to news reports, Associate Professor Goh explained that the WP leadership had found his comments to have allowed "political opponents" to gain inside understanding of the party's operation and "cast a cloud" on the character of the WP's leadership (Ong, 2022).

Interviews by *The Straits Times* also revealed that there were party leaders who had been displeased with Ms Loh Pei Ying and Mr Yudhishthra Nathan, the two cadres who testified before the Committee of Privileges in support of Ms Khan in December 2021. On November 9, 2022, the pair announced that they had resigned from the party. In a joint statement posted on Mr Nathan's Facebook page, they "want[ed] to return to being regular citizens, free to express ourselves as individuals, without others questioning our loyalties and allegiances" (Ng W. K., 2022).

AHTC Appeal Judgement

A long-drawn legal dispute that came closer to a conclusion was the lawsuit launched by the Aljunied-Hougang Town Council (AHTC) against the WP leaders Mr Pritam Singh, Ms Sylvia Lim and Mr Low Thia Kiang in 2017. The lawsuit arose from 2017 after an audit found "serious flaws" in the town council's governance and highlighted improper payments of

S\$33.7 million to FM Solutions & Services, the managing agent appointed by WP. This included the waiving of a tender process to appoint a managing agent when WP took over the town council after the 2011 general election when its members became the parliamentary representatives of Aljunied GRC and the single-member constituency of Hougang. In 2019, the High Court determined that the WP MPs had breached their fiduciary duties to AHTC (Au-Yong, 2019). The case was then brought before the Court of Appeal in 2020.

In November 2022, the Court of Appeal reversed the 2019 finding and concluded that the WP MPs did not owe fiduciary duties to the AHTC. The main reason was that there was no fiduciary relationship between a town council and its members in the first place. To the favour of the WP MPs, the appeal judges also concluded that the WP leaders had acted in good faith when they waived the AHTC tender for the managing agent (Lim M. Z., 2022). The court did rule however that the three MPs at the time, Mr Singh, Mr Low and Ms Lim, were liable to pay damages to the town council for “gross negligence” in the management of payment processes. The court would assess damages after receiving more information from the parties involved (Lam, 2022).

Parliamentary Challenges by Opposition Parties

Progress Singapore Party (PSP)

In July 2020 after the general election, opposition party PSP revealed that their members Ms Hazel Poa and Mr Leong Mun Wai would take up the two NCMP seats that the party was entitled to as “best-losers”, when they contested in West Coast GRC. Mr Leong had since been particularly vocal in challenging the government on various policies and decisions.

In January 2022, Mr Leong questioned the government’s COVID-19 strategy by claiming that schools were carrying out vaccination-differentiated measures amongst the students. After failing to present proof of his allegation, Leader of the House Minister Indranee Rajah issued a stern warning against making claims that “cannot be substantiated or are irresponsible” (Baharudin, 2022).

In March 2022, Mr Leong had to apologise for his Facebook post falsely alleging that he had been prevented from asking questions during the debate on the National Budget (Goh, Y.H., 2022a).

On October 3, Mr Leong made a speech urging for “better oversight of public expenditures [*sic*]”. He targeted two projects — the funding of SPH Media Trust and the termination of the public-private partnership in operating the Sports Hub. Mr Leong argued that the deal with SPH was “questionable” whilst Sports Hub had gained unfair benefits (PSP, 2022b). Ms Indranee responded to Mr Leong’s objections by asserting that his allegations were

“without basis”. She reiterated the financial rationale of both expenditures and criticised Mr Leong for linking figures and issues to other issues of no relevance (Goh, Y.H., 2022d).

On December 8, Mr Leong published a post on Facebook arguing that the government’s subsidies for HDB flats were in reality far less generous than they had made it out to be. He argued that the pricing of HDB flats should exclude land costs given that they belong to the state (leongmunwai.sg, 2022a). In a separate post on December 16, he claimed that the “government has net positive cash flow from each HDB flat it sells” if land costs were taken out of the equation (leongmunwai.sg, 2022b).

Senior Minister of State for National Development Ms Sim Ann rebutted to Mr Leong’s post and invited Mr Leong to file a parliamentary motion to debate the pricing policies for BTO flat (Ng K.G., 2022b). Secretary-General of PSP Mr Francis Yuen followed up with another Facebook post on December 21 stating that party welcomed the offer to have a parliamentary debate and would file a motion to do so on the challenges facing Singapore’s public housing market (PSP, 2022c).

Drug Laws and Death Penalty

This final section on political development touches on Singapore’s drug and death penalty laws, which again drew domestic and international attention in 2022.

Challenges to Singapore’s Death Penalty for Drug Traffickers

The issues sparked public debate following the execution of Malaysian drug trafficker Mr Kalwant Singh on July 7. The following day, UN human rights experts published a press release where they “deplored the execution”. The experts further claimed that drug offences should not be considered serious crimes that warrant death penalty and that “a disproportionate number of minority persons were being sentenced to the mandatory death penalty in Singapore” (UNHR, 2022). On July 14, Mr Luke Levy, a student at the National University of Singapore, held a sign protesting the death penalty when he was on stage during the university’s commencement ceremony (Ang, 2022).

Home Affairs and Law Minister Mr K. Shanmugam defended the country’s stance at a dialogue session with students from the Nanyang Technological University held in September 2022. The minister maintained that the majority of Singaporeans continued to support the death penalty. Mr Shanmugam also pointed out the inconsistencies of those who had been critical of Singapore’s positions. He cited for example, half a million deaths throughout the world had been linked to drug abuse each year, yet attention has only been given to individuals that trafficked drugs (Tang, S.K., 2022b).

In October 2022, the issue came to public attention again when British billionaire Mr Richard Branson published a blog post challenging Minister K. Shanmugam’s claims about the effectiveness of death penalty and claimed that all who had been executed in Singapore

had been “small-scale traffickers” (Branson, R., 2022). On October 22, Minister K. Shanmugam refuted each allegation made by Mr Branson. In the press release published by the MHA, the ministry also invited Mr Branson to Singapore “for a live televised debate on Singapore’s approach towards drug and the death penalty” with Mr K. Shanmugam (MHA, 2022b). Mr Branson responded on October 31 where he declined the invitation for a live debate. His reasons were that a television debate was too limited in time and scope for such a nuanced discourse and that he felt that the conversation needed local voices (Branson, R., 2022). On November 5, MHA argued that there were contradictions in Mr Branson’s reasons for declining the inviting, “pontificating from a distant mountaintop, and then avoiding a serious discussion when challenged” (MHA, 2022c).

Several notable Singaporean commentators had also chimed in on the exchange. Law Society President Mr Adrian Tan, for example, wrote a commentary on LinkedIn saying that Mr Branson’s “reasons for backing out don’t make sense” (Tan, A., 2022c). The post gathered more than 2,400 positive responses from LinkedIn users. In a commentary on *Today*, SMU Associate Professor Eugene Tan similarly opined that Branson’s reasons were not consistent and disagreed with sentiments that the move by MHA was a gambit. Instead, he believed it was the authorities’ genuine effort in defending their policy and approach to law and order (Tan, E., 2022a).

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