

1. COVID-19: MOVING TOWARDS AN ENDEMIC STATE

On 22 Jul, Singapore returned to restrictions under Phase 2 (Heightened Alert). This came amidst a sharp rise in cases locally, with new clusters identified. Leaders and public health professionals issued statements regarding the tightened restrictions:

- **COVID-19 is a formidable foe and we must be prepared for setbacks.** The number of infections and deaths worldwide have risen due to the Delta variant. At Parliament on 26 Jul, Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong said that Singapore has to be prepared for new variants that may be more transmissible, lethal, and lead to worse outbreaks.
- **Tightening restrictions would buy Singapore more time to get more people fully vaccinated.** The spread of community cases was worrying as many seniors remained unvaccinated. However, Singapore is making strides in our vaccination progress. It is estimated that 80% of Singaporeans will be fully vaccinated by September.
- **Singapore is committed to the path of normalcy.** In ministerial statements issued on 26 Jul, the Multi-Ministry Task Force said that despite the tightened restrictions, Singapore is moving towards living with COVID-19, to allow Singaporeans to regain their lives and livelihoods, and reconnect with the world.
- During this **period of transition**, two key changes are necessary: (a) moving away from a focus on infection numbers, and (b) greater acceptance for differentiated restrictions for the vaccinated and unvaccinated.

“*The pandemic has convinced me that our people have the conviction and will to recover and build a brighter shared future post-COVID-19, and that this future is within our reach.*”

– DPM Heng Swee Keat in a speech on 26 Jun

Contributing to the Regional Fight against COVID-19

Offering Regional COVID-19 Assistance

On 14 Jul, MINDEF announced that the Changi Regional Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Coordination Centre (RHCC) will contribute to COVID-19 assistance in the region by facilitating HADR coordination and complement the efforts of regional and international mechanisms such as the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian affairs.



“Oxygen Shuttle” Programme

On 19 Jul, it was announced that in addition to earlier assistance in the form of oxygen cylinders, oxygen concentrators, ventilators, and other medical supplies and equipment, Singapore will support Indonesia’s fight against the surge of COVID-19 cases via an “Oxygen Shuttle” programme.



- Regular shipments of emergency oxygen supplies, including more than 500 tonnes of oxygen, will be sent to Indonesia to supplement the urgent need for oxygen in medical facilities.
- These efforts underscore the close relationship, solidarity, and mutual support between Singapore and Indonesia amidst the challenges of COVID-19.

Oxygen Supplies to Myanmar

On 28 Jul, MFA announced that Singapore will send 200 oxygen concentrators to Myanmar through the Singapore Red Cross, to support its fight against COVID-19.

- This supplements Singapore's earlier provision of polymerase chain reaction (PCR) machines, diagnostic tests, masks, hand sanitisers and other medical supplies.
- These contributions underscore the strong mutual support between both countries in the fight against COVID-19.



[Sources: MINDEF, 14 Jul; MFA and CNA, 19 Jul; ST, 20 Jul; CNA, 26 Jul; MFA and CNA, 28 Jul]

2. STRENGTHENING OUR DEFENCES AMIDST COVID-19

SAF Day Video Message and Interview 2021

On 1 Jul, Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen delivered his SAF Day 2021 address. He said that the way the SAF has responded during this crisis demonstrated its resilience and gave assurance that it can emerge stronger from COVID-19. He added that we must constantly adjust to keep up with security threats. Here are his key points:



SAF will treat COVID-19 as a daily reality

- As of mid-Jul, 92% of MINDEF/SAF personnel have received two doses of the COVID-19 vaccines.
- Disruptions to national service training and critical operations can be avoided.
- Vaccination will be offered to pre-enlistees, and other safety measures such as routine testing and wastewater surveillance.

SAF is on track for Next-Gen Transformation

- Advanced platforms and modern training areas developed locally and abroad will ensure that the SAF is ready to tackle increasingly complex security challenges.
- This includes the Army's latest suite of sense and strike capabilities, and the RSAF's Smart Airbase of the Future.

Postponement of National Day Parade (NDP) to 21 Aug

- Heartland fireworks and the Red Lions' free-fall jumps, originally scheduled for 7 and 8 Aug, have been cancelled.
- A ceremonial parade will be held on 9 Aug at the Marina Bay floating platform to mark Singapore's 56th birthday.
- Following the postponement, strict safety measures such as vaccine requirements and rehearsals to be conducted in smaller groups will make the event safer, while maintaining Singapore's tradition of marking our independence.

Safe and Secure Seas – Maritime Security in the New Normal

On 28 Jul, Dr Ng delivered the keynote address at the 7th International Maritime Security Conference (IMSC) about the impact of the pandemic on security and defence. 28 countries participated in the IMSC, where the importance of a rules-based maritime order, maintaining maritime peace, and ways to strengthen cooperation and connectivity were discussed. Here are Dr Ng's key points:



- Supply chain disruptions, partly as a result of the pandemic, have exposed **vulnerabilities in the interdependent global system**. The Suez Canal blockage in Mar 2021 compounded the problem. These vulnerabilities could be exploited by hostile actors.
- **More coordinated, multilateral efforts are needed** to deal with transnational threats, such as biological threats and climate change. In the face of these future threats, such as Disease X, "the cost of unpreparedness and discoordination will be too great."
- **Militaries must play a decisive role** in combating transnational threats across various domains. This includes information sharing and adhering to rules to prevent conflict.

“ Safe and Secure Seas is a necessary fundamental for the well-being of today's world. Without it, we cannot build out futures, either as individual countries or collectively.”

– Dr Ng in his speech on 28 Jul

[Sources: MINDEF and ST, 30 Jun; 6, 8 and 28 Jul]

3. COMMITMENT TO STRENGTHENING RACIAL HARMONY

The issue of race and discrimination were discussed at recent public forums on race relations, as well as at Parliament on 5 Jul. Following several incidents of racism in past weeks, MPs filed questions on a wide range of issues, ranging from racial insensitivities online to the Government’s Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP) for HDB flats. Here are the key points discussed:



- Singapore’s racial harmony is **hard-won**, and came of laws and policies implemented over the years.
- Recent incidents of racist behaviour serve as a **reminder that Singapore cannot assume the policies** to ensure racial harmony over the years **have been perfect solutions**.
- Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Edwin Tong, acknowledged that **while race-based policies serve a function, they are not immutable**.
- He added that Singapore has long recognised the need to both **protect each ethnic community**, while also **bridging them through** a set of **common values** and a **common language**.

“For racial harmony to be enduring, the heavy lifting and the motivation must come from all Singaporeans, collectively, in an open fashion.”
– Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, Edwin Tong, in a ministerial statement on 5 Jul

“The vast majority of Chinese in Singapore know what is required to uphold this ethnic harmony, and what is at stake, and have helped foster a society at peace with itself despite its diversity.”
– Minister for Law and Home Affairs K Shanmugam at a public forum on race relations on 24 Jul

To strengthen racial harmony, Singapore takes a multi-pronged approach against racism:

Enforcement and legal framework

- Deal with egregious cases that undermine our racial and religious harmony through enforcement and law. For example, laws such as the Maintenance of Racial Harmony Act (MRHA), amended in 2019, and the Penal Code, make it an offence to deliberately wound others’ racial and religious feelings or promote disharmony between different races.

Encourage conversations on race and religious topics

- Identify and equip individuals with relevant skills to create safe spaces for open, meaningful and responsible discussions on race and religion.
- Work with community and religious groups to engage Singaporeans in constructive discussions, help clarify doubts and misconceptions, and rally them to stand against divisive rhetoric on racial and religious issues.

Encourage respectful online behaviour and social discourse

- Foster social norms for online behaviour and manage online content to guard against potential divisions. For example, the Media Literacy Council (MLC) and MCCY organise and encourage projects that promote civic-mindedness and racial harmony, and work with social media companies improve and enforce their policies.
- Support and encourage ground-up projects that promote racial and religious harmony, for example through funding schemes such as the Harmony Fund.

Enlarging our common spaces where Singaporeans can live, work and play together

- Provide opportunities for meaning interactions among Singaporeans of diverse backgrounds, for example through events organised by arts, heritage and sports organisations, People’s Association (PA) and the Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles (IRCCs).
- Nurture values of respect in harmony in our students, by promoting social mixing and cross-cultural understanding in schools. Students also get to bond and interact with one another regardless of background through core-curricular activities and other school experiences.

[Sources: ST, CNA, 5 Jul; MCCY, 5 Jul; ST, 24 Jul]

4. REMAINING OPEN AND STAYING CONNECTED

In response to false allegations that free trade agreements (FTAs) such as the Singapore-India Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) allow “foreigners ‘free hand’ to live and work in Singapore”, Minister for Manpower Tan See Leng, Minister for Health Ong Ye Kung and DPM Heng Swee Keat delivered statements to debunk such falsehoods in Parliament on 6 Jul.



FTAs are sources of opportunity for Singapore.

- FTAs create job opportunities for Singaporeans and help to build up local capabilities, while allowing us to remain open to global talent.
- Reduced tariff barriers have also encouraged local SMEs to venture abroad and given them access to overseas customers.

FTAs and CECA are crucial for our economic survival as a small nation with no natural resources

- Tapping into global markets to earn a living and be self-reliant is fundamental to our economic survival.

Competition between local and foreign PMEs is not a zero-sum game.

- The best way to advance Singaporeans’ interest is to strike a careful balance and make adjustments along the way.
- Minister Ong cautioned against mistakenly blaming FTAs such as the CECA for the difficulties faced by local PMEs.
- CECA does not favour any nationality as all foreign nationals have to meet prevailing work pass criteria.
- Xenophobic sentiments against foreigners could hurt our social fabric and economy.
- Minister Tan said that while the number of EPs has increased by around 40% in the finance and infocomm sectors from 2005 to 2020, these two sectors saw even stronger job creation for local PMEs.

“*We cannot survive, we cannot earn a living without being connected to the world, and without being welcoming to the world, without the House unanimously supporting our FTA strategy.*”

– Minister Ong Ye Kung in a ministerial statement on 6 Jul

[Sources: ST, CNA, 6 Jul; MOM, 6 Jul; ST, 8 Jul]

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