

**SPEECH BY MR ERIC CHUA, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR
CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH & SOCIAL AND FAMILY
DEVELOPMENT AT THE COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY DEBATE 2021, 8
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Introduction

1 2020 was a challenging year. COVID-19 forced us to change the way we live, work and play. What does not change, however, is our commitment to building a caring, cohesive and confident society. The pandemic brought to the fore the critical role of the People's Association and I note Mr Leong Mun Wai's related comment.

Role of the People's Association

2 As a statutory board, PA's mission is to build up the cohesiveness of our population – a reserve of social capital and goodwill that is built on trust between people and the Government. This is accumulated during peacetime so we are in a good position when crises, such as the one we are going through now, hit us.

3 We didn't know when the pandemic will strike. But when it did, PA swung into action: Four nationwide mask distribution exercises to date; hand sanitiser distribution; food delivery services for the vulnerable, especially during the Circuit Breaker period; TraceTogether token distribution; and most recently, CCs operating as Community Vaccination Centres, reaching out to seniors and others to be vaccinated.

4 A year ago, I am not sure any of us had "pandemic response" written in our workplans. But the networks, trust and bonds painstakingly built by

PA and its volunteers over the years has allowed us to respond cohesively, quickly and as one community, during the pandemic. This is the critical difference between our response here in Singapore and the responses we see elsewhere in the world.

5 To achieve PA's mission, the PA needs to be properly resourced. Its \$796M budget comprises: \$207M development budget mainly to build and upgrade community clubs. The remaining \$589M is for operating expenditure. It is however, not very meaningful, as member suggests to compare operating budget to headcount, as the \$589M includes both manpower as well as other operating expenditure. And much unlike other agencies like IRAS or GovTech, PA manages a whole host of community facilities all across Singapore, fully manned by fulltime staff. And this includes 108 CCs, and 665 RC centres, which needs regular maintenance as well as other operating costs.

6 PA's budget allows it to carry on with its peacetime mission of providing our people – in their thousands, every day – with activities that enrich them and which they enjoy. It also enables the building of the networks and communities – the relationships of trust.

7 As a former grassroots leader myself – for 15 years, in fact – I am very proud of the work done by PA and its grassroots. As answered before in this chamber, the political affiliations of volunteers are not relevant to our consideration in the volunteers' participation in PA, because the PA's missions is fundamentally focused on community building. So the social capital we have built up over time, the harmony we enjoy within our society, taking care of our residents, including our seniors and the

vulnerable ones amongst us – the value of all these, I would say to this house, are not easily quantifiable.

8 PA's role in peacetime and in crisis are inseparable. In many countries, people are divorced from the political and administrative machinery. They have difficulties knowing, much less understanding what goes on. Government is a distant, sometimes even alien, entity. In Singapore, we want to explain our policies and provide channels for communication between Government and the people, because we believe the Government must be connected to the people.

9 But why? Because we believe nothing can be achieved if we don't get buy-in from our people. Singapore works only when Government and people, businesses, unions, and communities, all come together. PA exists to provide the social glue, without which Singapore would have gotten nowhere.

10 The networks and bonds of trust that enable the PA to perform its role in peacetime are also what enable the PA to play a vital role in a crisis.

11 When a major Government policy is announced, PA, together with grassroots Advisors, goes to the ground and explains the policy. This includes conveying unpopular policies, hearing directly from residents about their concerns, so we can allow them to voice their concerns, allowing Government to tweak and adapt policies, if needed. These relationships of trust and comradeship that we have built – bit by bit, through good times and bad – are what enabled us to respond as one Singapore during the pandemic. This is what the late Mr S Rajaratnam meant by a “democracy of deeds”.

12 The Member can rest assured that PA's budget we have set aside has been put to good use. The proof of the pudding is in the eating and there is no doubt that the PA has proven its worth in the past year.

Building a caring society through strengthening the digital capabilities of the charity sector

13 Let me next talk about our charities.

14 Charities play an important role in our society by ensuring that no one is left behind. Mr Mohd Fahmi Bin Aliman asked how we are helping our charities to be digitally ready.

15 MCCY is working together with the Tote Board and NCSS to develop a first ever technology hub for non-profit organisations to accelerate the sector's digital transformation.

16 As a 'one-stop shop' for key Info-Communication Technology (or ICT) services, this tech hub for NPOs will avail funding and ICT consultancy services to charities from the "Arts and Heritage", "Community", "Education", "Health", "Sports" and "Others" sectors. This is over and above support provided by NCSS under the Tech-and-Go! initiative, and we hope to make this available by July 2021.

17 Charities can leverage several schemes under this technology hub, including technical advisory, digital implementation consultancy, digital strategy planning, and the adoption of large-scale specialised ICT solutions.

Building a cohesive society through sports

18 Let me next move on to sports.

Sustaining Sports Participation

19 Mr Xie Yao Quan and Ms Hany Soh asked about how we plan to sustain sports participation.

20 Under our Children and Youth Sport Framework, SportSG is scaling up the Nurture Kids programme in all pre-schools. We are on track to provide all pre-schools with access to the Nurture Kids Train-the-Trainer initiative by 2022.

21 SportSG is also on track to partner the National Institute of Early Childhood Development (NIEC) to build the capabilities of their lecturers through a co-developed SportSG-NIEC Train-the-Trainer programme. This will equip early childhood educators with the knowledge to develop children's fundamental movement skills.

22 SportSG's Active Parents movement has also seen more than 10,000 parents come onboard since the launch in April last year. During the circuit breaker period, the initiative helped parents stay active with their children through online resources and stay-home virtual activities.

23 With the resumption of physical programmes, the Active Parents School Holiday Programme was introduced to provide more opportunities for parent and child to participate in sporting activities together and

encourage parents to take on an active role in guiding their child through the activities. I'm looking forward to taking part in those activities with my 8-month-old son in time to come.

24 For working adults, SportSG will launch the Active Health Corporate Playbook in mid-2021. The Playbook guides companies through the principles of health and wellness, organisational development, and evidence-based coaching to help corporates adopt sport and physical activity as an organisational strategy.

25 While we have programmes in place, it is also important that we ensure access to our sports facilities. Mr Faisal Manap asked how we are improving our facilities booking system.

26 SportSG actively monitors feedback on the system through channels such as SportSG's feedback hotline, the system's technical helpdesk as well as app store reviews.

27 In 2019, SportSG rolled out version 2.0 of its booking app and regularly releases updates in response to public feedback, as well as to keep up with app developments. SportSG has also been working to finetune booking policies and stepping up efforts to combat scripting and on-selling activities.

28 For instance, SportSG has enhanced on-site enforcement measures, where hirers of ActiveSG facilities are required to be present or have their booking cancelled. It has also enhanced system measures to deter scripting, and imposed stricter penalties against errant members, including account suspension for those found to have abused the system.

Just last month alone, 105 accounts were suspended and 735 bookings cancelled after investigations.

Uplifting confidence and pride as a sports sector

Supporting the Sports Industry

29 Mr Mark Chay shared that visitor-ships at sports and fitness centres have not returned to pre-COVID levels and he suggested that sports and fitness be considered a tier-two sector.

30 Since the progressive opening of the sports sector in June last year, the sector has benefited from the Sports Resilience Package (SRP) that was launched in October 2020.

31 To-date, close to 100 businesses have benefited from an Operating Grant under the SRP that covers up to 25% of their total operating expenses (capped at \$15,000 per month) for up to six months.

32 Mr Chay may be pleased to note that this year, we will provide more support through the enhancement of the SRP.

33 Let me explain, to provide short-term financial support to critical sports businesses, SportSG will extend the SRP Operating Grant from April to December 2021. This grant helps to defray operating expenses for awardees whose businesses are classified as “Private Academies and Clubs”, “Private League Operators” and “Facility Operators”.

34 Applicants must show that revenues continue to be severely impacted, show commitment to preserving jobs and must not be receiving other operating grants from the Government, including SportSG.

35 For coaches, we will extend the training allowance grant and structured mentorship programme to the end of the new financial year. The extended training allowance grant is open to Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents with a valid National Registry of Coaches (NROC) membership who have completed the required training hours based on their membership category. With this grant, each NROC coach can claim for continuing coaching education courses, up to a maximum of 30 hours.

36 Likewise, the structured mentorship programme is open to all active coaches who are registered with NROC, and coach developers who are Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents. Under this programme, mentees will receive a monthly allowance of \$400, and mentors, \$600 monthly, for six months.

37 We will also extend the Enterprise Innovation and Capability Development Grant that was launched in June last year. It will cover 70% of qualifying costs capped at \$180,000. Projects supported should cover one or more of these categories, and that includes fan/consumer engagement, high performance and sport science, next-generation infrastructure and facilities, or health and wellness.

38 Finally, the SEP Project Grant. This grant will give more opportunities for SEPs to work and hone their skills. The grant for each application is capped at \$25,000 or up to 70% of qualifying costs – specifically operating costs for running projects, events or programmes.

Project teams must comprise at least one sport SEP registered with organisations such as NROC or ActiveSG.

39 SportSG will also support the industry through an Industry Development Plan that sharpens our approach to growing the sports sector.

40 The plan will support the sector in adapting and innovating through the enhancement of digital capabilities and innovation. SportSG will also develop a digitalisation roadmap to help businesses assess digital readiness, identify innovation and opportunities, and spur digital adoption.

41 The second area is the enhancement of workforce capabilities that will see collaborations between workforce and educational agencies to develop a skills framework, and this will help provide better careers, training, education and professional development pathways for the sports workforce.

42 I thank Mr Mark Chay for suggesting we have a skills framework for the fitness sector. Currently, CoachSG works closely with educational institutions such as Republic Polytechnic, the National Institute of Education and Nanyang Technological University, and has strong partnerships with overseas organisations to develop capabilities and content. There are also partnerships with industry players such as NTUC's National Instructors and Coaches Association to provide coaches and fitness instructors with opportunities for professionalisation and career development.

43 Mr Mark Chay also suggested developing the e-sport industry and community in Singapore. MCCY and SportSG have indeed been working with the relevant government agencies to explore opportunities. For instance, agencies have been supporting major e-sports events, local start-ups, as well as building the talent pipeline for the video games industry. This includes the Global Esports games where SportSG has been engaging the organisers. We are also supporting the building of an e-sports community – especially among the youth through community events, community sports clubs, NYC and *SCAPE.

44 At the same time, MCCY is working with MSF and NYC and a panel of youths on guarding against potential ill effects of e-sports. SportSG is also working with stakeholders to put together a code of practice. For instance, SportSG will be working with MOE to have all primary and secondary school students educated on the risks associated with gaming through cyber wellness education resources.

High Performance Sports

45 Moving on to high performance sports. Mr Xie Yao Quan asked how our athletes are preparing for the major Games. Mr Xie also shared that that our athletes need to be supported to embrace challenges in the “new normal”.

46 We fully agree. We are working closely with the Tokyo Olympics Games Organising Committee to ensure the safety of our athletes and officials. This includes a COVID-19 testing regime and allowing accredited athletes to train during the 14-day quarantine period, subject to a negative swab test.

47 Our swimming and badminton teams are also looking forward to a Pre-Games Training Camp in July in Kochi, Japan. This is made possible by an MOU between SportSG and the Kochi Prefectural Government.

48 SportSG will also roll out a series of Computer Vision Systems that leverages video technology to better analyse an athlete's performance. This system will be piloted in three sports – swimming, table tennis and football; and will be deployed at selected venues. The first batch of cameras for swimming has already been installed at the Singapore Sports School and will be rolled out across the two other sports within the year.

49 Besides empowering our active athletes, I thank Mr Mark Chay for his suggestion to set up an alumni for Team Singapore and we are happy to explore this further.

50 Currently, Team Singapore athletes who have represented Singapore at the Major Games are granted free lifetime access to ActiveSG swimming pools and gyms and invited to attend sports events. Those who have been inducted into the Sports Hall of Fame are also given additional access to sports medicine services at the Singapore Sport Institute Sports Medicine Centre and are invited to speaking at engagements at schools and sports clinics.

51 SportSG will continue to work with key stakeholders such as the SNOC – Singapore National Olympic Council, the Singapore National Paralympic Council as well as the National Sports Associations (NSAs) to proactively engage these athletes.

Singapore Football

52 Finally, Minister spoke earlier about uplifting Singapore football. Mr Sitoh is right. We have not been doing well in football in recent years. As a teenager, I was neither a good football player, nor was I a most diehard fan. But I could, like many in my generation, rattle off names of football heroes that everyone knew: Fandi Ahmad, Nasri Nasir, Lim Tong Hai and super sub Steven Tan. And who could ever forget that legendary bicycle kick goal that Sundramoorthy scored against Brunei in 1993! Electricity was in the air at that point of time – in the Kallang Stadium, at the coffee shops, in our homes, in front of our TV screens. Each time our Singapore team scored a goal, our entire neighbourhoods would shake with excitement and passion, and we rally behind our football teams.

53 So, this is my plea, not just to Members of this Chamber, but to all Singaporeans. Whatever your views of the state of Singapore football right now, I ask for your support as we reimagine and re-energise Singapore football.

54 We will start with our children and youth. MCCY will work with MOE to build up a robust participation base, with about 2,000 boys per primary school cohort exposed to football techniques and tactics under FAS's national curriculum. This is an inclusive vision – a timely one given today is 8 of March, International Women's Day – because we also want to grow the participation base for women's football.

55 We will be engaging secondary schools to invite them to establish School Football Academies (SFAs) where aspiring footballers can further develop their skills in a school-based training environment, supported by

an augmented coaching bench, enhanced facilities, and an intensive training programme. Youth footballers under the SFAs will compete in an elite youth league to hone their competitive edge. Talented students outside of these SFAs will also be scouted to join the ActiveSG Football Academy Development Centres so that they too can receive similar levels of training support and competition exposure.

56 For those who wish to pursue a professional career in football, local and overseas scholarships will be provided for our top youth talents. FAS is in discussions with overseas football institutions such as La Liga, Bundesliga Club Borussia Dortmund as well as Australian colleges such as Maribyrnong College. And locally, we will work with clubs such as the Lion City Sailors to provide similar opportunities.

57 Our footballers will be tracked through a national athlete monitoring database, which will operate alongside a new Football High Performance Centre, that brings together our sport science capabilities under a technology-enabled space.

58 We will also work with our partners to improve the ecosystem. One example is the provision of NS support for our elite and aspiring footballers. MCCY is working with MINDEF to tap support avenues for eligible footballers, including early enlistment, leave and time-off for NSFs to train, as well as opportunities to continue training and playing at the very top levels while fulfilling their NS obligations.

59 Now these are just some of the examples of what we are doing. More details will be announced by the FAS and SportSG in due time.

Conclusion

60 Mr Chairman, I would like to declare at this point that I am not citing this next quote because of your allegiance to a certain football club but because I truly believe in what has been said. Liverpool legend Bill Shankly once said, and I quote, "If you cannot support us when we lose or draw, don't support us when we win." Members of this Chamber, deep down in our hearts, I know Singaporeans are not fair-weathered fans. Whether we are supporting our footballers, or our athletes in the Olympics or the SEA Games, let us all stand resolutely behind our athletes. They have poured blood, sweat, and tears into their sport, made sacrifices to be the best they can be, so let us all, as fans of Team Singapore, give them our wholehearted support!

61 Mr Chairman, to conclude, whether it is about supporting our fellow men and women in the arts, charities, sports, youth or community sectors, Singapore can be a caring, cohesive and confident society only if we continue to weave our diverse threads together, as one Singapore Tapestry.