

PRESS RELEASE

FOURTH REPORT OF THE ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

1. The Estimates Committee presented its report to Parliament on 4 November 2024. The Estimates Committee had considered the Budget for the Financial Year (FY) 2024/2025 (Paper Cmd. 27 of 2024) and enquired into certain matters, including the Age Well SG, National Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2.0, and the Financing of Statutory Boards.
2. In the course of its enquiry, the Committee had considered two memoranda from Ministry of Finance (MOF).
3. The Fourth Report of the Estimates Committee (Parl. 21 of 2024) is attached.

Age Well SG

4. Concerning Age Well SG, the Committee received updates on Singapore's demographic shift towards an ageing population and the initiatives to support senior citizens. It was noted that by 2030, approximately one in four local residents would be over the age of 65, with an estimated 100,000 seniors potentially experiencing mild disabilities.
5. The Committee noted the Government's plans to expand Active Ageing Centres (AACs) to 220 by 2025. Additionally, it was shared that infrastructure for the elderly is being enhanced through various initiatives led by the Ministry of National Development (MND) and the Ministry of Transport (MOT). These initiatives include in-flat improvements, such as EASE 2.0, estate-level upgrades, and street-level projects like the Friendly Streets initiative. **Initially focused on HDB estates, these enhancement programmes are now being extended to private estates** through the expansion of AACs and the Estate Upgrading Programme.
6. The Committee noted that \$3.5 billion had been allocated for Age Well SG initiatives and encouraged Government to share outcomes and health impacts when data becomes available. The Committee commended efforts to attract and retain healthcare workers and urged continued focus in this area. Regarding Age Well SG initiatives by MND and MOT, the Committee advised prudence in ensuring cost-effectiveness, administrative efficiency, and avoiding wastefulness, suggesting reviews and reduction of duplicate features where necessary.
7. **The Committee noted that the Action Plans for Successful Ageing were published in 2015 and 2023. Given the increasing importance of ageing issues in the coming years, the Committee recommends that such reports be published every five years or more frequently.**

National Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2.0

8. The Committee sought information on Singapore's National AI Strategy 2.0 (NAIS 2.0), which builds on lessons from NAIS 1.0 to address the evolving AI landscape. The Committee noted that the Government aims to triple the number of AI practitioners over the next three to five years. **Of the 10,000 additional AI practitioners the Government plans to develop, 70% are expected to be Singaporeans and Permanent Residents**, split almost evenly between fresh graduates from Information and Digital Technologies programmes and mid-career switchers. However, the Committee observed that the career conversion programme had, to date, supported 190 individuals in transitioning to new roles, excluding industry's own hiring and training programme.
9. The Committee was encouraged to note the promising results of the National Multimodal Large Language Model Programme (NMLP) for Southeast Asian languages. It was shared that NAIS 2.0 aims to achieve excellence and empowerment, as measured by international AI rankings and the readiness of enterprises and citizens to adopt AI. The Committee noted that success metrics are being developed across three key areas: activity drivers, people and communities, and infrastructure and environment.
10. The Committee commended the progress of the SEA-LION model in understanding Southeast Asian languages and encouraged continued international collaborations. The Committee also supported keeping the SEA-LION models open-source and publicly accessible. Additionally, it noted the evaluation processes for the AI Visiting Professorship and AI Accelerated Master Programme, recommending periodic reviews to further develop Singapore's AI research pipeline.

Financing of Statutory Boards

11. The Committee reviewed the governance, funding models, and financial management of Statutory Boards (SBs) in Singapore. **It noted that 20 out of 49 SBs listed in the Schedule of the Statutory Corporations (Contributions to Consolidated Fund) Act 1989 were self-financing.** Additionally, it was shared that some SBs were also required to declare dividends annually.
12. **The Committee noted that the Tote Board had accumulated reserves of \$4.2 billion as of the end of FY 2022, the highest among Statutory Boards not protected by the Reserves Protection Framework.** The Committee acknowledged the explanation that these financial reserves allow the Tote Board to make long-term funding commitments, with grants lasting up to five years. This approach ensured that the Tote Board could maintain its grant obligations during economic downturns or periods of increased social demand. Furthermore, the reserves enabled the Tote Board to supplement its revenue through income from investments.

13. The Committee expressed appreciation for the detailed updates on the management of Statutory Boards (SBs) over the past decade and was assured by the Government's monitoring of SB funding, expenditures, dividends, and contributions to the Consolidated Fund. This supervision of SBs was noted to prevent surplus accumulation and promote capital efficiency. Nonetheless, the Committee urged the Government to continue conducting periodic internal reviews of SB surpluses and to ensure that SB functions are appropriately assigned, with resources allocated to the entities best suited to carry out the required functions.
14. The Committee noted there were current efforts to reduce SB's fees and charges such as CAAS's effort to reduce compliance cost for drone shows. The Committee also acknowledged the need for varied operating models and reserve policies across SBs. Nevertheless, the Committee encouraged more frequent reviews and called for further efforts to enhance productivity, streamline processes, and leverage innovative technology to pass on cost savings to the public.

Remarks from Chairman

15. Mr Ang Wei Neng, the Chairman of the Committee said, "As Singapore transitions to a Super Aged Society, we are encouraged by the Government's plans to expand the number of Active Ageing Centres (AACs) and enhance infrastructure in both HDB and private estates. Through the Age Well SG initiative, we are optimistic that these efforts will support our seniors in living longer, healthier lives."

"We are also heartened by the Government's commitment to preparing Singapore for the future of artificial intelligence. With plans to add 10,000 new AI practitioners over the next three to five years, of which 70% will be Singaporeans and Permanent Residents, we are better positioned to embrace the rapid advancements in generative AI technology."

"Finally, we urge the Government to conduct more frequent reviews, enabling Statutory Boards to continually boost productivity, streamline processes, and harness generative AI and other technologies to reduce fees and charges for the public."

**Office of the Clerk of Parliament
5 November 2024**