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Title:	DEBATE ON ANNUAL BUDGET STATEMENT,DEBATE ON ANNUAL BUDGET STATEMENT
MPs Speaking:	Dr Fatimah Lateef (Marine Parade);Dr Lily Neo (Jalan Besar);Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim (Marine Parade);Dr Ong Seh Hong (Marine Parade);Miss Penny Low (Pasir Ris-Punggol);Mr Arthur Fong (West Coast);Mr Chan Soo Sen (Joo Chiat);Mr Chiam See Tong (Potong Pasir);Mr Edwin Khew Teck Fook (Nominated Member);Mr Gautam Banerjee (Nominated Member);Mr Lim Biow Chuan (Marine Parade);Mr Lim Swee Say;Mr Ong Kian Min (Tampines);Mr Sam Tan Chin Siong (Tanjong Pagar);Mr Abdullah Tarmugi (Mr Speaker);Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam;Mr Wee Siew Kim (Ang Mo Kio);Mrs Jessie Phua (Nominated Member);Ms Eunice Elizabeth Olsen (Nominated Member);Ms Irene Ng Phek Hoong (Tampines);Ms Lee Bee Wah;Ms Sylvia Lim (Non-Constituency Member);The Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports (Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon);The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports (Mr Teo Ser Luck);The Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs (Mr Zainul Abidin Rasheed);The Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education (Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M)

ANNUAL BUDGET STATEMENT

Ms Lee Bee Wah: Sir, please allow me to deliver my speech in Mandarin.

(In Mandarin): I rise in support of the Budget speech by the Second Finance Minister, Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam. In crafting this year's Budget, the Minister is like a renowned Chinese calligrapher. With a few brief strokes, he is able to say many things in not so many words, unfurling much wisdom without sacrificing content.

This year's Budget has taken into consideration the needs of all strata of the society, from the lower income to the middle and upper income groups, the

sacrifices of our national servicemen have not gone unnoticed, and not forgetting the retired civil servants who have in the past worked relentlessly and made exceptional contributions to the country.

However, this year's Budget has not attempted to address the needs of a particular group. They are our home-makers - housewives or house-husbands. Yesterday, a few of our fellow MPs have raised this issue, and I think it is extremely important. Therefore, I will reiterate this message again. The stay-at-home spouse plays a crucial role in supporting the family. They have selflessly performed their roles and some of them are even involved in voluntary work in the various grassroots and charitable organisations. As such, they have made a great contribution to our nation. Their task is not an easy one as they have to support the family, look after the children, attend to the needs of the husband and in-laws and be responsible for the family's well-being. In this regard, they should also reap the rewards along with the rest, and be given due recognition. One form of reward for these homemakers is to explore the possibility of their husbands contributing CPF for their spouses who are home managers. It is indeed heartening to listen to the men and working women talking about the Budget during the Lunar New Year gatherings and discussing how much they will benefit. However, I do also notice that the housewives could only sigh and remain silent.

Let me quote the late British politician, Ms Eleanor Rathbone. She said, "There is, I suppose, no occupation in the world which has an influence on the efficiency and happiness of the members of nearly all other occupations so continuous and so permeating as that of the working housewife and mother."

Sir, I now move on to talk about our elderly folks. I notice a trend of more and more elderly people looking for employment in their golden years, but those jobs available for them are mostly lowly paid ones, such as cleaners, machine operators and salesmen, etc. My question is whether this trend has any implications for us. Is it telling us that the lower income families are finding it difficult to make ends meet and, therefore, the old folks have to come out and work to supplement their household income? Or is it because their children are not providing them with adequate financial support? Or is it because the old people are finding it really boring to stay at home and, as such, they would rather go out to work and keep themselves mentally occupied, and be financially independent? I have heard of a trend in US for older people to keep working beyond 65 years old.

I understand it is a very difficult task to get the low-income group to think of

savings for their retirement and old age. This is something which is important for all Singaporeans, irrespective of income group. I do not know whether the Government can get the insurance industry or any financial group or even the unions to work out a savings scheme like the endowment fund to give the lower income group an opportunity to save something for their old age.

Mr Speaker, Sir, please allow me to continue my speech in Malay.

(In Malay): Mr Speaker, allow me to give my views on education. I commend and support the Government's move to give top-ups of up to \$400 per year to the Post-Secondary Education Account (PSEA) for every Singaporean child aged 7-20 years old in 2008 and 2009. Older children and those from the low income families will get higher PSEA top-ups.

This policy is very encouraging as it motivates learning and provide opportunities for those from the low income families to upgrade their standard of living through achievement in education. In this spirit, I would urge the Government to be more generous with top-ups given to the lower-income families. The cost to further their higher studies is not cheap and the top-up will not be able to meet this cost.

The Government should also consider expanding the list of approved institutes to include the many universities that are offering courses through schools or private institutions in Singapore.

We should remember that not all students are capable of scoring good grades to ensure them a place in distinguished universities, like NTU, NUS and SMU. Students who are not able to get a place in these universities should be given an opportunity to further their studies through other avenues. Many of them may be late developers and would require a longer time to attain excellence in education. We should encourage this group of students and provide them with opportunities to further their studies.

Considering that the usage of CPF savings to buy shares has been permitted, I would like to suggest to the Government to consider seriously the usage of CPF

savings by those who wish to upgrade themselves through part-time Diploma or degree courses. Using CPF savings to upgrade oneself is a more valuable investment than buying shares. This will enable Singaporeans to better prepare themselves in facing the challenges of a globalised world. This is also a good way to help PMETs.

As an added measure, I would like to suggest to the Government to set up a not-for-profit institute of education to run these post-secondary courses so that many more people can get a leg up on the social ladder.

(In English):

Helping SMEs

Sir, next, I will move on to the internationalisation of local businesses. The Government has eloquently spoken about the need for our local business, especially the SMEs to venture abroad. However, the global environment is often fraught with over-powering currents for the SMEs that may prevent them from staying afloat. As such, I feel that the Government should consider getting the bigger boys in the Government-linked companies to work together with the local SMEs when they venture abroad. When these big corporations get a project abroad, instead of sub-contracting to foreign companies or start their hiring spree, they should consider tying up with our SMEs back home. This way, they will be helping to give them a headstart and shorten their learning curve by taking them under their wings. Of course, the SME chosen must be able to deliver and be competitive at the same time. For the big Government-linked corporation, working with a home-grown SME will have its advantages because there will be no cultural gap and they also have a better understanding of each other. This will help our local SMEs to have a wider reach and expand their horizons, as well as gear them to globalise their business.

Car owners and road tax

Finally, I note that the 8% rebate on road tax for owners of passenger cars and motorcycles is indeed the Jack-in-the-box in this year's Budget. The concern among those who benefit from this is that they may end up paying back 8 percentage points more than what they are going to receive if they read the Government's policy on road transport accurately. I can only voice their concern that this road tax rebate which is tabulated in the Finance Ministry's statement as Benefit for Individuals and Households will not leave them having to pay a lot more when the policy to charge motorists based on road usage is implemented.

Sir, before I conclude, I would like to touch on some points that Ms Sylvia Lim mentioned just now. This is not to start a Ah Huay versus Ah Lian debate. I just want to comment that spending on social services for the greying population by Government cannot be taken for granted. Only prudent and good government like ours can do so.

Recently, I went back to visit my mother during Chinese New Year and I met up with my friends and, of course, all of them congratulated me.

They said, "Wah, Bee Wah, you're going to get rich very soon."

I asked them, "Why do you say so?"

They said, "Oh, you can get any licence that you want. Of course, you'll get rich very soon."

I said, "Excuse me, this is Singapore."

And they were telling me that for the politicians, if they did not know how to make use of the advantage and make sure that the pocket is fat, that is not a politician, in their definition or in their dictionary. But I assured them that, in

Singapore, the politicians are here to make sure that we take care of our residents and take care of our citizens. So, if we do not have a good government, we do not have a prudent government, we can never think of spending on social services.

The other point is that we increase GST only when it is needed. This made me think: are we going to be ruled by the Chinese proverb "*chuan dao qiao tou zi ran zhi*"? In Chinese, *wo xu yao de shi hou, wo xu yao le, wo ming tian* increase GST *liang ba xian*.

My mother always tells me that when you want to pass motion, you have to find a toilet first.

When I was studying in the UK, I met friends from Myanmar and Cambodia. They said, "Bee Wah, I really admire you. How I wish that my country has Mr Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP."

Conclusion

Sir, let me conclude by once again congratulating the Second Finance Minister for presenting a Budget where the lines are clearly drawn and the policies clearly defined. The Minister has transformed what could have been just another annual Budget into a platform where we can pin our hopes for a brighter future. The Minister has perhaps realised the thoughts of the Spanish painter and sculptor, Pablo Picasso, when he said, "There are painters who transform the sun into a yellow spot, but there are others who, with the help of their art and their intelligence, transform a yellow spot into the sun."

Mr Speaker, Sir, with this, I support the motion.