A SINGAPORE FOR ALL SINGAPOREANS

Addressing the concerns of the Malay Community

A SINGAPORE FOR ALL SINGAPOREANS:
ADDRESSING THE CONCERNS OF THE MALAY COMMUNITY

SINGAPORE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Executive Summary

In September 2012, the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) held a public forum to discuss matters that the Malay community in Singapore is concerned about. At the event, the SDP promised that we would draw up a policy paper and make alternative proposals to address these concerns.

The result is *A Singapore for All Singaporeans: Addressing the Concerns of the Malay Community*. It is an alternative blueprint to build a truly multi-racial multi-cultural society that lives up to the promise of our national pledge: We the citizens of Singapore, pledge ourselves as one united people regardless of race, language or religion...

The single most important motivation for writing this policy paper is the concern that the Singaporean identity and culture is being eroded with the influx of foreign nationals—almost 40 percent of the population in Singapore is non-Singaporean. As a consequence, many Singaporeans complain that they feel alienated and have become strangers in their own country.

The antidote is to develop an inclusive system. When we do this, we build trust and cohesiveness amongst the various races in our country. With trust comes loyalty. Only then will we be able to hold together as a people if and when a crisis befalls us.

To achieve this noble and necessary objective, we must tackle the underlying causes that put the Malay community in Singapore at a disadvantage.

We start off with economic concerns. In 2010, the median household income for Malays is $3,844 compared to $5,100 for the Chinese and $5,370 for Indians. Some may argue that this is a the result of a meritocratic system where reward is dispensed according to one's ability. This paper argues that the situation is not as straightforward as one may think. Factors such as education, job opportunities, social prejudices that are extraneous to hard work and intellect come into play to determine economic outcomes.

The existing situation must be addressed and a remedy to the problem are the introduction of a minimum wage legislation and a retrenchment benefits scheme.

A major determinant of economic progress is education. Education is the great leveler and the key to social mobility. This paper identifies the various aspects of our educational system including pre-school education, the award of state scholarships, Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools, *madrasahs* and the Tertiary Tuition Fund Scheme (TTFS).

We propose initiatives to nationalise kindergartens and pre-schools, make the process of awarding scholarships transparent, expand the SAP school system to include students from minority ethnic groups, make funding for schools such as missionary and *madrasah* schools (which do not receive state support) consistent, and revise the criteria for qualification for TTFS.

Another important area that adversely affects our Malay community is the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) where Malays are disproportionately under-represented because of the outdated views and positions adopted by the Government.

The SDP proposes the SAF Commission for Integration to ensure that the recruitment and promotion of military personnel are based on performance rather than racial considerations. Our country's national security is not threatened by the presence of Singaporean-Malays in our armed forces who have pledged their undivided loyalty to our nation. A report written by a Government appointed committee plainly stated that

> It is clear that the Malay/Muslim community has a strong sense of belonging to Singapore. For some, this is due to a sense of history and heritage. For others, especially the young, this is a given—they have grown up in this country, and many of their experiences, from school to national service, are shared with other Singaporeans.

Instead, our national security is threatened by the massive numbers of foreigners that the Government has let into the country. National cohesion is at risk with the Government adopting an overly liberal immigration policy. In such a scenario, loyalty to the country diminishes which, in turn, endangers the morale of our NS men who are called to defend the country in a war. Also, with such a high proportion of nationals from our neighbouring countries, Singapore's national security is greatly jeopardised if conflict with one of these countries arises.

The other issues tackled in this paper relate to healthcare, housing, and social spending, each accompanied by concrete and viable proposals.

The central theme of the SDP's paper is the building of a Singaporean identity. With the Government's policy of flooding the country with foreigners, there is the danger that the uniquely Singaporean culture and identity, of which Singaporean Malays form an integral part, will be eroded.

Policy-making is more than just enacting laws that regulate behaviour. It must help to develop a people who imbibe a strong sense of nationhood and belonging to their country. Loyalty and patriotism must go beyond singing the national anthem and reciting the pledge. It must entail that intangible factor which binds a citizen to the sights and sounds of her homeland, and keeps alive the dreams and aspirations of his home. Absent such an emotional bond and we will succeed only in building skyscrapers, not a nation.

A Singapore for All Singaporeans seeks to build just such a society where Singaporeans develop an unbreakable bond with our nation. And we can only do this if we cultivate our national culture and identity by treating our Malay community as an indivisible part of the Singaporean society.

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Introduction

The rich heritage of Singapore has always been our mix of the various Asian ethnic backgrounds, including early immigrants from China, India, the rest of Asia and Europe. But the earliest recorded inhabitants of the Singapore island can be traced back to the 11th century Parameswara reign where the *Nusantara* people were indigenous to Southeast Asia.

Following the arrival of the British Empire, the number of immigrants grew rapidly, with the Chinese becoming the main ethnic group.

With time, this segment of the population dominated commerce and, following World War II and the ejection of the colonial administration, also established itself as the main player in modern Singapore's political life.

In 1963, Singapore became a component state of the Federation of Malaysia. Two years later, we left the Federation under acrimonious and unclear circumstances when the Malaysian government, led by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), felt it was in Malaysia's best interests that Singapore remained separate. The People's Action Party (PAP), which was governing Singapore then, seemed to agree. The reason for the split was portrayed by the PAP to be due to its stance on the concept of a Malaysian Malaysia.

The PAP had wanted to discard UMNO's *bumiputra* policy which it saw as discriminating against non-Malays (although it had no problems with the same policy in 1963 when it campaigned wholeheartedly for merger of Singapore with the Federation). The heady mix of race-based politics in Malaysia also meant that Singapore found itself embroiled in some of the ethnic conflicts that engulfed the region.

Following the race riots between the Malay and Chinese communities in 1964, the division between, or at least the policies that separated, the two ethnic groups became more pronounced even though the majority of the ordinary people in the two groups continued to live peaceably together. To quell the disturbance, the government severely proscribed discussion of race and religion in Singapore. In addition, policies regarding National Service (NS), public housing, education, welfare assistance, religion, etc. were introduced that sought to address ethnically related issues *vis-à-vis* internal and national security. These policies have been seen by many in the Malay community as discriminatory and working against the group's interests.

In the late 1990s, the Singapore Government embarked on a policy to increase the Singaporean population by allowing the mass immigration of foreigners. The reasons for this have never been satisfactorily explained and raised alarm among the locals. One of the issues that society raised was that the Singaporean identity, of which the Malay community is an integral part, is being diluted. The intermix of the main subcultures through the decades in Singapore has produced a unique national culture and way of life that Singaporeans have identified with.

The infusion of such large numbers of new immigrants in such a fast pace has unsettled Singaporeans who have raised the important issue of the erosion of the Singaporean identity which, as mentioned, is made up of a unique mix of the Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian and other subcultures. In particular, Malays in Singapore are concerned that while ethnic Chinese and Indian groups are growing, the Malay sub-population has shrunk from 15 percent in the 1970s to 13.5 percent presently.

Not only are more non-Malay immigrants settling in Singapore, the number of Singaporean Malays emigrating overseas is increasing. In 2009, the Malay-language newspaper *Berita Harian* reported that Malay migration to Australia was on the rise. An immigration consultant in Singapore said that 30 percent of his clients are Malays, a number which is disproportionately higher that the overall 13.5 percent of Malays in Singapore.[1] Some have attributed such an increased emigration rate to the continued paucity of employment opportunities for Malay families.[2]

The government's response

In August 2012, the SDP called for such issues to be addressed and organised a public forum titled *The future of Singapore—do Malays have a part?* (see here) to highlight the concerns of the Malay community and draw up proposals that would help to resolve some of the problems that Malays in Singapore faced.

Several days later the Minister in-charge of Muslim Affairs, Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, announced the setting up of an "independent, non-partisan committee" whose task was to gather feedback from the Malay-Muslim community on their concerns and aspirations as well as to make recommendations to address the matters raised. The findings of the committee was published in July 2013 in a report titled *Suara Musyawarah* ("voices of discussion and ideas").[3] In terms of scope and depth, the report is commendable. It identifies issues which have been raised previously and repeatedly by the Malay community in Singapore. These problems were also discussed in the

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1 *More Malays move to Australia*, The New Paper, 4 November 2009, http://a1preview.asia1.com.sg:90/vgn-ext-templating/v/index.jsp?vgnextoid=b1d404cd988b4210VgnVCM100000430a0a0aRCRD&vgnextchannel=f6dbadbd2b722110VgnVCM100000bd0a0a0aRCRD&vgnextfmt=print

2 Cited in Transitioning.org, *Malay engineer works in Australia due to racial discrimination in Singapore*, 2 December 2010, http://www.transitioning.org/2011/05/03/malay-engineer-works-in-australia-due-to-race-bias-discrimination-in-singapore/#sthash.CbkMHXTw.dpuf

3 *Suara Musyawarah: Conversations with the Community,* July 2013, Suara Musyawarah Committee.

public forum organised by the SDP.

The recommendations put forth by the *Suara Musyawarah* committee, however, lack specificity. For example, the report acknowledges the unhappiness of the community when it comes to Malays being unable to serve in the SAF. As a recommendation, however, the commit-tee only hoped that such a policy "could be conti-nually reviewed, so that the Malay/Muslim community is viewed in the same light as any other community and would have no reason to feel that their loyalty is questioned." There seemed to be a reluctance to clearly state that discrimination in the SAF should not be condoned and that concrete steps be taken to ensure that equal opportunity exists in the Ministry of Defence's recruitment policy.

Many of *Suara Musyawarah's* recommendations are also piecemeal designed to plug holes without tack-ling the root cause of the problems. For example, the report cited that low-income families could not even afford the transport cost of sending their children to mosque-run programmes. It then recommends volunteer *asatizahs* (religious tutors) to teach groups of these children in their homes. Such a suggestion, while commendable, fails to address the fundamental question of why families in Singapore earn such low incomes that they cannot even afford transport costs to send their children for educational programmes.

The myth of meritocracy

Malays in Singapore lag behind the other ethnic groups when it comes to household income. One-fifth of Malay households in Singapore live on less than $1,500 per month. Nine percent of the community live in one- or two-room flats, with an emerging and increasing trend towards homelessness.[4] These evident signs of economic disenfranchisement begs the question: why has the Malay community not moved in tandem with the rest of the Singaporean population?

The answer can be found in a critical examination of the concept of 'meritocracy' which has been adopted by Singapore as one of its official guiding principles for public policy formulation and promotion of talent, placing emphasis on academic credentials as objective measures of merit. Meritocracy may be effective in a developing society that is generally poor and where opportunities are abundant and academic achievement can be a surrogate marker of drive, determination and talent. As

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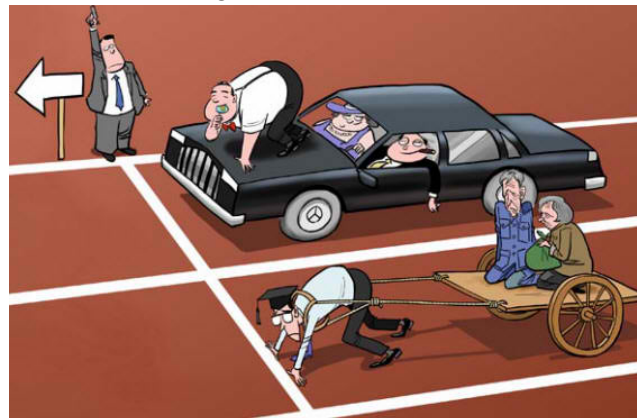
4 *A Malay Underclass: An Exploration of a Uniquely Singaporean Issue*, 2012, Maryam Mohamed Mokhtar, Mavis Ang I-Wen.; Noor Ashikin Abdul Rahman.; Amellia Abdul Razak, Nanyang Technological University.

economic development takes place and an upper class emerges, however, political influence and patronage of the elite work to entrench its position and interests. This works against equal opportunity and the departs from the fidelity of the concept of meritocracy. The Singaporean society has become increasingly stratified with an elite class being created from a narrow segment of the population. The privileges of the rich in Singapore give it an unfair advantage over others and makes socioeconomic mobility difficult. To be sure, there are cases of individuals from poor family backgrounds who make it good but these are the rare exceptions. Such cases are, however, used by the entrenched elite to justify the status quo and highlight the fact that equal opportunity exists for everyone when, in fact, there is a significant problem of systemic bias against the lower classes.

Even more troubling is the tendency of our government to project meritocracy along racial and ethnic lines, when certain groups such as the Malays are stereotyped as less hardworking and capable.

Genuine meritocracy is a laudable concept if properly practised. However, *selective* meritocracy robs society of vitality and our economy of potential talent. Malay families find themselves at starting points far behind the rest of Singaporean society. Even those that rise above the odds and achieve success in their fields suffer from a lingering fear that the playing field is still not level for them or for their children.

The view towards Malays

Singaporeans are a tolerant people. In recent years, however, there have been a spate of instances where racially offensive remarks were posted on the Internet. In 2005, three bloggers were charged under the Sedition Act for posting inflammatory comments attacking Malay Muslims.[5] In 2008, a Chinese male was arrested for posting derogatory remarks about a man who was apparently unkempt and riding public transport. The blogger's comments had attacked the man's Malay ethnicity.[6] In 2012, assistant director of the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), Amy Cheong, was sacked by her employer after she wrote remarks on her Facebook disparaging Malays about their low-cost weddings at void-decks and their high divorce rate. She received a warning from the police.[7] Even members of the PAP were making racist comments about Singaporean Malays. In 2011, Jason Neo, a member of Young PAP, posted a photograph of a school bus with Malay children dressed in their traditional Malay head-wear. He captioned the picture with "Bus filled with young terrorist trainees?"[8] Neo resigned from the party.

Even though quick and stern action were taken against the culprits, the problem may be more deep-seated and complex than at first glance. Government ministers who make laws to maintain religious and racial harmony have themselves demonstrated a lack of sensitivity and understanding towards the feelings of the Malay-Muslim community in Singapore. George Yeo, when he was minister for foreign affairs, was asked why the Government banned the book *Satanic Verses* and not *The Last Temptation of Christ* and he said that this was because "Christians are less likely to riot".[9] Lee Kuan Yew has often commented on the Malay-Muslim community in disparaging ways. In 2010, he said in an interview: "Well, we make them say the national pledge and sing the national anthem but suppose we have a famine, will your Malay neighbour give you

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5 *Third Singapore racist blogger pleads guilty to sedition*, AFP, 26 October 2005.
6 *Blogger arrested for posting racist online content*, The New Paper, 21 May 2008.
7 *Racist rant: Amy Cheong gets stern warning from police*, Straits Times, 25 May 2013.
8 *PAP Youth member quits over 'racist' online posting,* 18 November 2011, Asiaone.com, http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20111118-311261.html#sthash.m3mUha7f.dpuf
9 *Maintaining harmony here 'a daily struggle'*, Straits Times, 16 March 2011.

the last few grains of rice or will she share it with her family or fellow Muslim or vice versa?"[10] More recently, in January 2011, he said in his book *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going:* "I would say today, we can integrate all religions and races except Islam. I think we were progressing very nicely until the surge of Islam came and if you asked me for my observations, the other communities have easier integration—friends, intermarriages and so on..."[11] This prompted the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) to issue this statement:

> [The AMP] deeply regrets certain comments made by Minister Mentor (MM) Mr Lee Kuan Yew in his book *Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*... We do not agree with MM's views. In our view, MM's comments have hurt the community and are potentially divisive... Fundamentally, there is nothing wrong for any community in Singapore in being distinct, for it to carry out its religious practices, or in asserting its identity. Islam enjoins Muslims to integrate within the broader Singapore community. It is not mutually exclusive for a good Muslim to be a good Singaporean... MM's comments, which had purported to touch on integration, could be potentially divisive... Apart from the issue of the practice of Islam, MM had also commented that the Malay/Muslim community will never catch up with other communities in Singapore. Again, this is regrettable. To state this in print is effectively condemning the MMC (Malay-Muslim community) as a lagging and marginalised community, even in the longer term.[12]

Lee's statements are not mere musings. National policies have been based on such an outlook. Recruitment of army personnel have discriminated against Malay Singaporeans (see below).

National or communal problem?

Although the concerns of Malay Singaporeans merit attention, there is little national discussion on them. It seems that the Government's approach is to isolate the subject within the Malay community. The wider public is not encouraged or given the opportunity to get involved with the issues.

This is, at best, a short-sighted approach; the less the subject is discussed at the national level, the less the other ethnic groups will understand the issues that Malay Singaporeans face. The problems should not just be a concern of the Malays but of the whole Singaporean community. This paper is thus aimed at not just Malay-Muslims but also other ethnic groups in Singapore.

Some of the proposals made in this paper, such as enacting a minimum wage law or introducing a universal healthcare system, are not targeted specifically at Malays but would nevertheless impact the community in a substantial way. Other proposals are drawn up to address problems that are unique to Malay-Muslims in Singapore such as ensuring that the Ministry of Defence discontinues its discriminative recruitment policy. The primary objective of this paper is to build a national community that is inclusive and embraces Singapore's multi-racial and multi-religious composition not just in word but also, and more importantly, in practice. In seeking to redress problematic policies, we are guided by the principle "to do no harm and to benefit all".

Policy-making is more than just enacting laws that regulate behaviour. It must help to develop a

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10 Transcript of Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew's interview with Mark Jacobson from National Geographic on 6 July 2009, http://www.news.gov.sg/public/sgpc/en/media_releases/agencies/pmo/transcript/T-20091228-1.html

11 Cited in *Lee Kuan Yew urges Muslims to 'be less strict'*, AFP, Jan 23, 2011, http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hmM9iHjTTGwAC-MZv19__oNqX3zw?docId=CNG.4f8b988b9ebd1a5c9a9eba1574013bc8.b81

12 Media statement: AMP responds to comments by Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew in *Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*, 27 January 2011.

people who imbibe a strong sense of nationhood and belonging to their country. Loyalty and patriotism must go beyond singing the national anthem and reciting the pledge. It must entail that intangible factor which binds a citizen to the sights and sounds of her homeland, and keeps alive the dreams and aspirations of his home. Absent such an emotional bond and we will succeed only in building skyscrapers, not a nation. The SDP's alternative proposals seek equality for the Malay community even as we reject the attempt to dilute the Singapore identity by mass importation of foreigners. We, therefore, encourage a discussion of the issues at the national level.

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SINGAPORE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Problems and Issues

In 1962, then-prime minister Lee Kwan Yew addressed a gathering of the Malay community in Singapore in which he spelt out three areas where the community was lagging behind: employment, education, and housing. Unfortunately, after more than 50 years Singaporean Malays are still lagging behind in these and other areas. In addition, Singaporean Malays are also disadvantaged when it comes to military service and welfare assistance.

Although the community recognises that there are many areas in which it can and must initiate more self-help measures, there are continued and institutionalised policies that make it difficult for self-improvement. If we are to progress as a nation, whose fruits of success benefit all strata of society, the Government must abandon discriminatory practices and institute practical and realistic measures that would facilitate the upward progress of our Malays citizens, starting with the measures highlighted below.

1. Economic concerns

The challenges that Malays in Singapore continue to face are underscored by the vast income disparity between them and the other main communities in Singapore. Between 1990 and 2000, the rate of household income growth among the Malays was the lowest.

In 2010, the median monthly income for Indian and Chinese households was $5,370 and $5,100 respectively—the median monthly income for Malay households, on the other hand, was $3,844[13] which was 25 percent below the national average of $5,000 (see Figure 1, next page). The *Suara Musyawarah* report on the economic status of Singaporean Malays observes that "low-income families appear to be trapped in a vicious cycle. This exacerbates the community's achievement gaps, particularly in education and income levels."[14]

As Singapore continues to prosper, many in the Malay community are finding themselves in the unenviable position of being in the most disadvantaged section of the population. Under representation in education and the economy is a significant problem. The bulk of Malay businesses—up to 70 percent—is in the service sector, serving the local market.[15] From informal observation these enterprises seem to be concentrated in the food & catering, property agencies and housing renovation sectors.

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13 Singapore Department of Statistics.
   http://www.singstat.gov.sg/publications/publications_and_papers/cop2010/census_2010_release2/findings.pdf
14 *Suara Musyawarah: Conversations with the Community*, accessed July 10, 2013,
   http://suaramusyawarah.com/s/Suara_Musyawarah_Report_English_8_July_2013-407r.pdf, p. 23.
15 Teo Ser Luck, speech given at the Singapore Malay Chamber of Commerce & Industry, 7 May 2013.
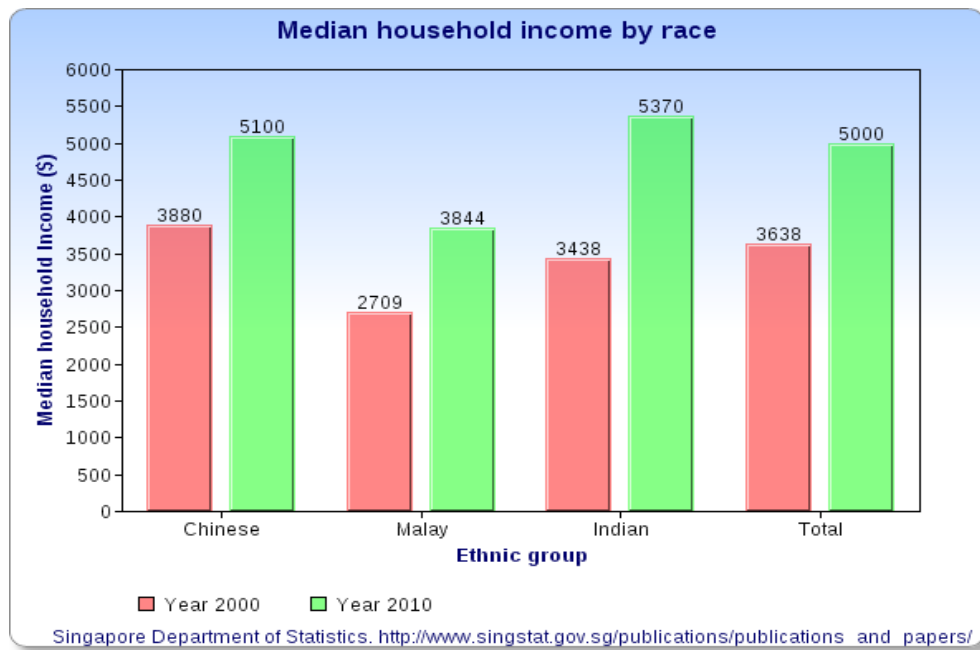
Figure 1

1.1 Income inequality

Income inequality does not affect the ethnic groups uniformly. As mentioned, the Malay community in Singapore receives the brunt. Financial deprivation from such inequality exacts a burden on familial relationships which further erode the emotional and physical make-up of its members. Children growing up in such households are often the victims and they become easy-pickings for gangs.

Wealth inequality also limits the educational progress of those in the lower-income groups. Right from the beginning, children who are unable to afford expensive elite pre-school education are perceived to have fewer chances to do well in early streaming examinations which can determine their future educational trajectories. Upon graduation, employment opportunities are much more limited for students from poorer families and the types of jobs are almost always the lower-paid ones. This vicious cycle puts those already at a disadvantage further down the totem pole. Family background is a major determinant in an individual's educational attainment especially in our current educational system which is highly affected by the expensive parallel tuition industry.

Academic failure and school drop-out rates rise dramatically among needy families. This creates a culture of poverty which often lends itself to criminal behaviour. Offences such as drug abuse, borrowing from loan-sharks, inability to pay fines, etc arise from poverty. It should come as no surprise that unequal societies have higher prison rates. Singapore, with its high inequality, has one of the highest numbers of prisoners per capita.[16] In 2010, Malays formed nearly half of those arrested for drug abuse (see Figure 2, next page).

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16 Wilkinson, Richard and Pickett, Kate, *The Spirit Level: Why equality is better for everyone*, 2009, Penguin.
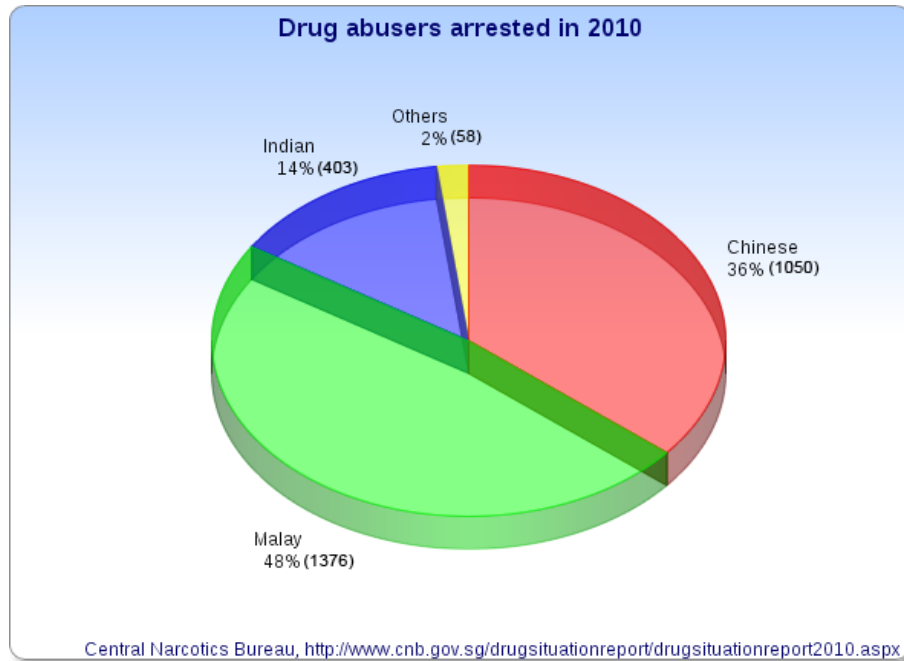
Figure 2

Wide income inequality also leads to greater household debt as families struggle to stay financially afloat. According to the Association for Muslim Professionals' (AMP) Debt Advisory Centre (DAC), Malays had a serious problem with debt. In the months after its launch in 1 April 2013, the DAC has already attended to 42 clients with debts totalling $1,130,748 owed to banks and moneylenders, both legal and illegal.[17] While it is important for individuals to observe financial responsibility and live within one's means, it is also a fact that many individuals go into debt because of financial hardship. Low wages in a high-cost economy contribute to the debt problem in the Malay community.

Taken together, these factors militate against the building of a cohesive society. Wealth disparity increases the social distances between sub-populations. It divides people by increasing the social distances between them.

1.2   Healthcare

Socioeconomic status also affects healthcare. Lower income groups are more likely to show greater levels of medical problems. This could be due to a range of factors such as the lack of financial resources to maintain healthy dietary habits or having to work long hours resulting in lack of time for recreation and exercise. Lack of information and health education has also impacted adversely on the Malay community. The obesity, hypertension and cholesterol levels among Malays is higher than for the other ethnic groups. In addition, younger Malay females (between 18 to 29) smoked the most (15.6 percent) compared to Chinese (5.4 percent) and Indian (7.4 percent) females in the same age group. Also, Malays exercised the least regularly compared to Chinese and Indians (see Figure 3, next page).[18]

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17 Cited in *Response to Suara Musyawarah Report* by the Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs.
18 *National Health Survey 2010*, Ministry of Health,
http://www.moh.gov.sg/content/dam/moh_web/Publications/Reports/2011/NHS2010%20-%20low%20res.pdf
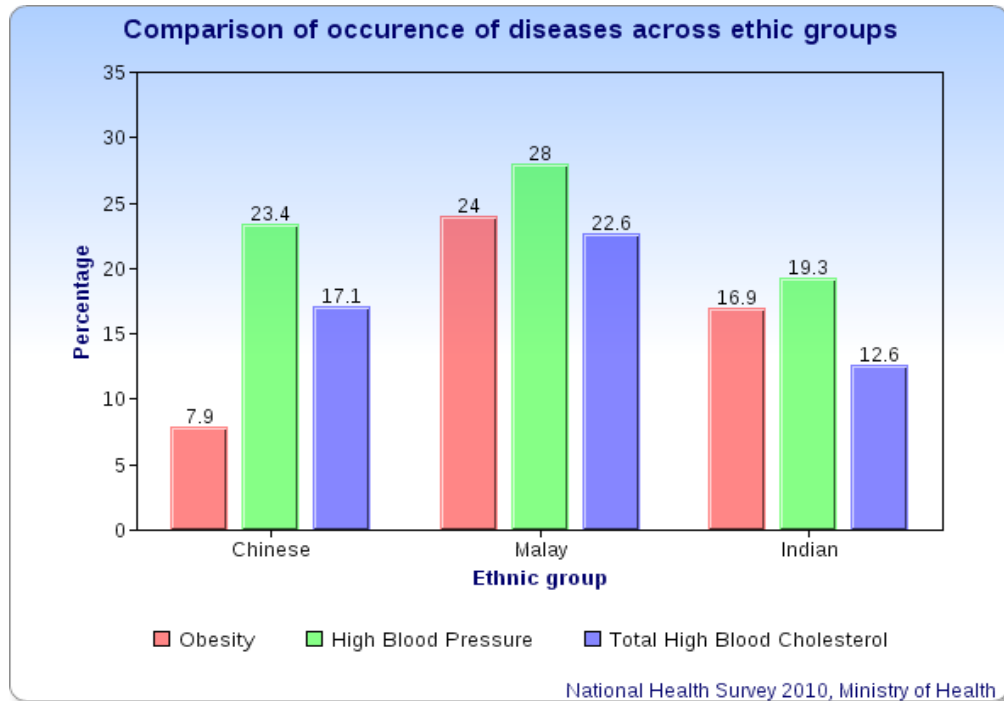
Figure 3

Clearly, there is a need for health education among Singaporean Malays. But there is also a need in terms of helping the community seek medical care. Data from National University of Singapore (NUS) showed higher rates of avoidable hospitalisation in Malays and Indians[19] and worse outcomes in heart disease[20] compared with Singaporean Chinese and Indians. The problems are compounded by the high medical cost in Singapore. The total health expenditure of Singapore is $12 billion in year 2011, whereas the Government's health expenditure was only $3.5 billion in the same year.[21] The present system consists of "3Ms": Medisave for hospitalisation, Medishield for catastrophic illness, and Medifund as a safety net. But the reality is that the 3Ms are only a small part in financing Singapore's healthcare financing:

- Medisave: $761 million
- Medifund: $84 million
- Medishield $386 million

Deductibles and co-payments are significant and there are limitations. For example, the 3Ms are primarily for "inpatient care", Medifund has severe limitations, and Medishield has many exclusions and high premiums. While public expenditure is low, out-of-pocket spending for healthcare in Singapore is very high. In fact, Singapore has highest out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure in East Asia. This would disproportionately affect the community with the lowest household incomes.

One effect of such high costs is that people avoid recommended screenings and

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19 Niti, M, and Ng T P, *Avoidable hospitalisation rates in Singapore, 1991–1998: assessing trends and inequities of quality in primary care*, Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health 2003; 57:17-22, http://jech.bmj.com/content/57/1/17.long

20 Niti, M, and Ng T P, *Trends and ethnic differences in hospital admissions and mortality for congestive heart failure in the elderly in Singapore, 1991 to 1998*, Heart. 2003 August; 89(8): 865–870, http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1767764/

21 *The SDP National Healthcare Plan*, 9 March 2012 Singapore Democratic Party.

treatment. When patients put off prevention and early detection of illnesses, the cost of treatment is magnified when they finally succumb to their medical problems and are hospitalised. Singapore public hospitals have $110 million in outstanding patient debts as of end 2011.[22]

Without a universal and affordable system that ensures that all individuals have access to quality treatment, the Malay community is placed at greater risk because of the economic position the group occupies in society.

1.3 SDP's Alternative Policies

1.3.1 *Legislate minimum wage*. To reduce income inequality and ensure a just and living wage for low-income workers, it is essential to introduce minimum wage (the lowest level of wages an employer may legally pay an employee) legislation. This is an important policy tool that balances the needs of an economy with the need of lowering income inequality so that economic growth occurs in a sustainable manner. While the benefits of such legislation will be discussed in detail in our forthcoming paper on the economic system, it is recognised that a minimum wage policy has several economic and social benefits:

- Increases the spending power of low-income Malay workers,
- Reduces poverty and alienation of the Malay community,
- Reduces stress on family relationships,
- Decreases dependence on welfare programs,
- Allows prosperity to be shared by all.

1.3.2 *Introduce retrenchment benefits*. Presently when a worker gets retrenched, he or she is left out in the cold with no financial protection. There is no legal entitlement to retrenchment benefits in Singapore unless they are expressly provided for in one's employment contract. Through no fault of theirs, retrenched workers suddenly find themselves in uncertainty and hardship. This causes severe strain on the entire family with serious social repercussions. Although lay-offs affect workers across the board, Malay workers are most severely impacted because a high percentage of these workers occupy the lower-income jobs that tend to be the most vulnerable when businesses down-size.

The SDP proposes that retrenched workers not covered by their employers be paid 75 percent of their salary for the first six months. This amount would be reduced to 50 percent during the following six months, and further reduced to 25 percent in the third six months. The payments will stop once the individual is re-employed. They would cease 18 months after retrenchment if the individual is still not employed by then. This will prevent a culture of welfare dependence from taking root. A cap will also be placed on the amount that any retrenched worker is paid.

Furthermore, under this proposal, each worker will be allowed to reject only up to three reasonable job offers in the one-and-a-half years of the entitlement programme following which, as stated, the retrenchment benefit ceases. Such a scheme will provide workers a cushion when they are retrenched while at the same time encourage them to seek reemployment.

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22 *S'poreans owe public hospitals $40m in unpaid bills*, Asiaone.com, 29 February 2012,
http://yourhealth.asiaone.com/content/sporeans-owe-public-hospitals-40mil-unpaid-bills#sthash.xaJK1baN.dpuf

Retrenchment payments should not be seen as added costs to taxpayers/employers but rather as an investment in our workers. Such a scheme can be funded by a combination of revenue streams from the state, employers and employed workers. Details of the scheme will be discussed in the SDP's economics paper that will be published in the near future.

1.3.3 *Mandate universal healthcare*. Healthcare is a basic right as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other similar covenants. It is not a commodity, and market forces have no part to play in the financing or delivery of basic healthcare to Singaporeans. This was historically the case in Singapore. The availability of low-cost, affordable, quality healthcare in the 1950s, '60s and '70s was one reason for Singapore's rapid progress into the ranks of developed nations.

Today, healthcare has been commodified with the well-off being able to acquire better healthcare. This puts the Malay community at a disadvantage as many in the community belong in the lower-income brackets. To remedy this problem, the SDP proposes the following:

- a single-payer system by establishing the National Health Investment Fund (NHIF) where the government and the people contribute into,
- compulsory individual contributions to the NHIF to be taken from one's CPF. The amount will average $427 per year per person (or $40 a month) depending on one's level of income (this is fraction of what one currently pays into Medisave),
- that the payment covers basic health, accident and pregnancy,
- co-payment with cap—to emphasise personal responsibility and reduce abuse, that is, hospitalised patients pay 10 percent of medical bill and NHIF pays the remainder with the patient's portion capped at $2,000 in any one year,

- issuing a Healthcare Benefits Smart Card upon payment of the annual contribution in the NHIF which entitles holder to a $10 subsidy whenever one visits the family doctor. The card also stores medical information, utilisation history and payment (reduces administrative costs),
- single-ward class which provide same treatment for all; treatment based on clinical need and not on ability to pay.

Such a healthcare system will alleviate the financial burden of Malay families when it comes to taking care of one's health.

2. Education

If income is a function of education then it is clear that the economic disadvantages faced by the Singaporean Malay community have only been exacerbated by the education policies of the Government. Socioeconomic mobility prevents the formation of a permanent underclass in society and education is key to such mobility.

It is a fact that the rich are likely to be able to provide their children with better education than low income families, by supplementing the national education system with private tuition and other enrichment programmes. The affluent can provide their children with a stable home, good health and nutrition, stimulating playschool, early introduction to technology, home computers, holidays, extracurricular activities, cultural enrichment, and tuition. They are likely to provide a more conducive environment to motivate the child to achieve.

On the other hand, such opportunities are largely not available to those in lower income groups. Teaching and attending school are not the only ingredients to a successful education. The physical and mental well-being of a child is equally important. A poor mother with poor nutrition is likely to give birth to a baby of low birth weight and this could affect the child's learning abilities in later years. Children with poor nutrition are less alert, curious, and less able to interact.

Children from poor families are often labeled as 'low achievers,' 'uninterested in studies,' or 'problem kids,' and consigned to lower streams. Malay students tend to disproportionately occupy such lower levels in the educational system. This lays the foundation for the creation of an underclass of which the Malays are predominant.

It also has an effect on the progress of these students at higher levels of learning. Politi-cal science tutor at the NUS, Walid Jumblatt, pointed out th-at Malays lagged behind the Chinese and Indians in univer-sity enrolment: The percentage of Malays en-rolled in universities in Singapore was five percent, compared to 22 percent for the Chinese and 35 percent for Indians.[23]

2.1 Pre-school education

One of the fundamental prob-lems that the Malay comm-unity faces is the lack of equal opportunity for strong found-ational learning at the pre-school level due to the community's economic marginalisation. Even at this early stage, there is already a difference in mental and social development between the various social classes and ethnic groups. The *Suara Musyawarah* committee noted, "It is critical to ensure that Malay/Muslim children have access to quality pre-school education,"[24] while lamenting the fact that "Many low-income children in our community are

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23 Presented during the SDP Public Forum held on 8 September 2012.
24 Suara Musyawarah, Conversations with the Community, 23.

not school-ready for the expectations of the first year of basic education."[25]

By the time a child enters primary school, there is a wide gap in the development and educational standards between children of different social backgrounds. Primary schools are unable to remedy this deficiency because the class sizes are big and teachers rush to complete classroom curricular. Only with a good pre-school foundation can this gap be closed. According to Harvard University's National Scientific Council on the Developing Child: "Children who develop warm, positive relationships with their kindergarten teachers are more excited about learning, more positive about coming to school, more self-confident and achieve more in the classroom."

2.2 Scholarships

Promising students at the pre-university level are awarded state scholarships by the Public Service Commission (PSC). The stated objective is "finding and grooming the right people" to ensure that those with "the right capabilities and values are brought in to serve as public officers."[26] Scholarship holders are then funded to study at reputable universities and, upon graduation, serve in the Public Service.

Between 2009 to 2013, the PSC awarded 380 scholarships of which only 6, or 1.6 percent, were given to Malays (or at least, ones with Malay/Muslim names).

Year	No. of recipients	No. of Malays
2009	85	1
2010	69	0
2011	72	3
2012	62	1
2013	92	1

Table 1: Public Service Commission scholarship awards
(Source: PSC Annual Reports)

PSC scholars are, as pointed out, groomed for senior positions within the Public Service. It stands to reason that with disproportionately fewer Malay awardees, there will also be fewer Malays occupying high-level appointments in the civil service. Indeed, a survey of the Permanent Secretary and Deputy Permanent Secretary positions of which there are more than 50, none are Malays. Also, none of the senior civil servants assisting the various ministers in the Prime Minister's Office are Malays.[27]

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25 Ibid, 31.
26 *Singapore Public Service Commission Annual Report 2012*,
http://www.psc.gov.sg/content/dam/psc/annual_reports/PSC%20Annual%20Report%202012.pdf
27 http://app.sgdi.gov.sg/listing.asp?agency_subtype=dept&agency_id=0000000014

The PSC is also responsible for the selection of candidates for the President's Scholarship, Lee Kuan Yew Scholarship, Goh Keng Swee Scholarship and other ministry-specific scholarships.

For the President's Scholarship, the Commission appoints a Selection Committee consisting of the PSC chairman and not more than three persons representing the institutions of higher learning in Singapore. The Committee bases its selection of President's Scholars on "general and specific standards" which include scholastic ability, co-curricular record, character and personality.[28] In any one year, the number of such scholarships to be awarded is capped at ten. Of the 228 President's Scholarships awarded from 1966-2007, only 14 (6.1 percent) went to minority ethnic students.[29] This percentage dropped to a low of 3.5 percent in the years following 1981, despite the fact that ethnic minority groups make up more than 20 per cent of Singapore's population.

When Adil Hakeem Mohamad Rafee was awarded the President's Scholarship in 2012, he became the first Malay recipient in 44 years.[30] Only two Malay students have ever received the scholarship (the other was Ismail Ibrahim, who received the award in 1968). The number of scholarships given by the SAF to individuals of minority status appears to be even more lopsided. Though the Ministry of Defence does not publish recipients of SAF scholarships, it is estimated that as little as two percent of the awards given between 1971 and 2005 went to non-Chinese applicants. [31]

2.3   Special Assistance Plan (SAP) Schools

SAP schools, which theoretically support academically gifted students regardless of ethnicity, are, in practice, catered mainly to Chinese students. The aim of such schools, first established in 1979, is "to preserve the ethos of the Chinese medium schools" and to

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28 *President's Scholarships Regulations*, 11 May 2011,
http://www.pscscholarships.gov.sg/content/dam/pscsch/pdf/President-s%20Scholarships%20Regulations%202011.pdf

29 Michael D. Barr, *The Charade of Meritocracy*, Far Eastern Economic Review 169, no. 8 (2006): 18-22.

30 Stacey Chia and Matthias Chew, *5 Receive President's Scholarship Award*, The Straits Times, August 16, 2012.
http://www.straitstimes.com/breaking-news/singapore/story/5-receive-presidents-scholarship-award-20120815

31 Barr, *The Charade of Meritocracy.*

enhance "the learning of Chinese language, culture, and values"[32] while grooming bright Singaporean Chinese students to have a strong command of both English and Mandarin. SAP schools are funded and run by the state.

It is important that Singaporean Chinese continue to be well-grounded in their cultural roots and therefore be exposed to the education of the Chinese language. SAP schools serve that function and should continue to do so.

However, intended or not, the SAP programme creates an English- and Mandarin-speaking elite, steeped academically and socially in an environment devoid of ethnic minorities. Graduates of such a school system may be less well-equipped to interact socially and professionally with the non-Chinese members of the Singaporean society, lacking understanding of and sensitivity towards other cultures. This does not bode well for our national objective of fostering a multi-racial Singapore. The SAP school system should thus be expanded to include minority ethnic students.

2.4 Madrasahs

Madrasah schools, aimed at providing formal religious education for Malays and other Muslims in Singapore, have existed for more than a hundred years. Funded largely by merchants within the local Muslim community comprising Arabs, Indian Muslims, and Malays, *madrasah* education has become very much a part of the Malay-Muslim way of life.

Unlike government-aided Christian schools and the Chinese-aided schools (as well as SAP schools), *madrasahs* neither receive recognition as a formal educational institution nor funding from the state. The Muslim community raises its own funds in order to manage and finance its six full-time *madrasahs*. Donations received from the community for *Dana Madrasah* is being managed by the *Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura* (MUIS; Islamic Religious Council of Singapore). In 2012, $1.04 million was disbursed to the six *madrasahs*.[33] State funding of *madrasahs* is denied because the Government regards these schools as religious institutions. However, the *madrasah* education system was revised in 2009 to include secular subjects in its curriculum. In fact, the first batch of students under

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32 *Enhanced Programmes by Special Assistance Plan Schools to Enrich Students' Learning of Chinese Language and Values*, Ministry of Education, 11 February 2008. http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/2008/02/enhanced-programmes-by-special.php

33 *$8.5 million given to madrasahs in the last 5 years*, Berita Harian, 15 August 2012.

the new system will enter Secondary 1 in 2015 and will take their O-level examinations in 2018. A pilot group taking the International Baccalaureate Diploma course will start in 2019. Yet, *madrasahs* are still not given funds by the state. The Prime Minister belatedly acknowledged this inequity when he announced during his National Day Rally in August 2013 that *madrasah* students would be given access to Edusave funds which other Singaporean children enjoy.[34]

2.5 Tertiary Tuition Fee Subsidy (TTFS)

Malay parents, like parents in other communities, know that education is the basis which their children can achieve success. Singaporean Malays are motivated to raise the educational performance of their children so as to catch up with the rest of the Singaporean society. In order for the Malay population to catch up with tertiary education, fees for Malay students at tertiary institutions were waived.

However, the Government did away with the policy in 1991 and required these students to pay fees. The fee waiver was replaced by a means test; households with monthly income exceeding $3,000 would no longer qualify for any assistance. As of 1 January 2011, the criteria for subsidy eligibility are as follows:

Household (per capita) income ($)	Eligible subsidy (%)
1,000 and below	100
1,001 to 1,200	75
1,201 to 1,500	50

Table 2: Level of household income to qualify for TTFS (Source: Yayasan Mendakiwebsite:http://www.mendaki.org.sg/tertiary-tuition-fee-subsidy/tertiary-tuition-fee-subsidy.aspx)

With fees at local universities increasing significantly, the goal of encouraging Malay students to pursue further education is harder to reach. Even as more Malay students qualify for post-secondary education, an increasing number of families are finding the associated costs to be an added—and for the lower-income families insurmountable—barrier. The policy shift does not help the effort to level up society. While it is recognised that the main driver of education is individual motivation, finances play a critical role in facilitating the pursuit of higher education especially when fees are high.

2.6 SDP's Alternative Policies

The challenges that the Singaporean Malay community faces can be addressed in large part through equal opportunity in education. Current policies undermine the endeavour to level up society. The following policies are targeted at making the education system fair and accessible to the Malay community in Singapore:

2.6.1 *Nationalise pre-school education*. The SDP proposes that the Ministry of Education undertake the running of pre-school and kindergarten education. Trained educators will be employed to provide pre-schoolers with the requisite literacy, numeracy and social skills to cope with standards required at the primary school level. The present system of kindergartens run by the PAP, albeit through its foundation, will be

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34 *NDR 2013: Edusave extended to include madrasah students*, Straits Times, August 18, 2013,http://www.straitstimes.com/breaking-news/singapore/story/ndr-2013-edusave-extended-include-madrasah-students-20130818

abolished. Such a measure will equalise the quality of kindergarten education. Details on the SDP's policy towards preschool education will be introduced in greater depth in a forthcoming policy paper on education.

2.6.2 *Make award process transparent*. While it is recognised that the selection of candidates for state scholarships requires an evaluation process that must, to a degree, be subjective, steps must be taken, however, to ensure that the scholarships are awarded without prejudice. For instance, PSC guidelines regulating the selection of President's Scholars state that candidates must "refrain from participating in activities which are, or are likely to be, inimical to the interests or security of Singapore." Given that the leaders of the Government, in particular Lee Kuan Yew, have openly questioned the loyalty of Malays in Singapore and that the SAF adopts a recruitment policy of limiting Malays within its ranks (see section below), has such a stipulation adversely impacted on Malay students when it comes to shortlisting nominees for President's Scholarships?

To avoid such discrimination, or even the perception of it, the Government must publicly and rigorously repudiate offensive statements made by Lee Kuan Yew and other Government officials against the Malay Community. The Government must reiterate its stand that it does not condone any form of discriminatory practices in the Public Service. It must also abandon its policy of discriminating against Malays in the SAF. It is imperative that the public have confidence in the PSC and scholarship selection committees when it comes to choosing our state scholarship holders.

The SDP proposes that selection committees conduct their selection processes in a transparent manner by submitting a report to Parliament detailing their evaluation processes and justifying their selection of the award recipients.

2.6.3 *Revise TTFS cut-off*. Tuition and other educational fees have increased through the years. In March 2013, the Government raised fees in many of the academic institutions (including the Institutes for Technical Education to the polytechnics to universities). NUS, for example, raised fees by as much as eight percent:

Faculty	Amount ($)	Increase(%)
Arts and Social Sciences	7 650	2.5
Business	8 950	6.3
Law	10 800	6
Medicine	23 050	8

Table 3: Increase of university fees in 2013 (Source: *Universities, polytech-nics and ITE raise tuition fees*, Straits Times, 30 March 2013)

The SDP recommends a higher household income cut-off for Malay students to qualify for TTFS. However, we will defer on presenting the specific cut-off point as we will be reviewing of the fees of tertiary education in our paper on education.

2.6.4 *Expand SAP school system*. The regime of SAP schools will be expanded to include the teaching of Malay and Tamil as mother tongue languages. Such a measure will enable Malay students to be enrolled in SAP schools. This will help to create a more inclusive school environment where students are exposed to the various cultures

instead of the present segregated system. Such exposure will foster the development of a national identity and culture.

2.6.5 *Fund madrasahs*. State funding will be made available to *madrasahs* on the same basis as it is available to government-aided schools. This will bring consistency to the policy of (partial) government funding for schools of various religious backgrounds such as *madrasahs* and missionary/Christian schools. *Madrasahs* will also be required to recruit non-Muslim teachers to teach students in secular subjects.

3. Regardless of race

3.1 Singapore Armed Forces

National Service (NS) was introduced in Singapore in 1967 where male citizens who turned 18 were conscripted to serve in the military for at least two years. Shortly after its implementation, Malays were not called up for such service. In 1977, the policy was changed again to require Malay males to perform NS duties but restricted to the police force and civil defence (fire brigade). All this time, the Government adopted a policy of neither admitting nor denying the barring of Malays from the armed forces. In 1987, however, Lee Hsien Loong who was then Second Minister for Defence remarked that, "if there is a conflict, if the SAF is called to defend the homeland, we do not want to put any of our soldiers in a difficult position where his emotions for the nation may be in conflict with his religion."[35] He was, of course, referring to Malay-Muslims in Singapore.

His father, Lee Kuan Yew, has also stated that Malay Singaporeans cannot be trusted to serve in the armed forces. Lee senior said that, "If, for instance, you put in a Malay officer who's very religious and who has family ties in Malaysia in charge of a machine gun unit, that's a very tricky business. We've got to know his background...I'm saying these things because they are real, and if I don't think that, and I think even if today the Prime Minister doesn't think carefully about this, I and my family could have a tragedy."[36] He added in 2011: "We've got friendly neighbours? Grow up...There is this drive to put us down because we are interlopers," he said, citing alleged Malaysian and Indonesian efforts to undermine

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35 *Straits Times,* 23 February 1987.
36 *Straits Times,* September 19, 1999.

Singapore's crucial port business.[37]

Such discrimination has been, and remains, an issue of concern for the Malay community. The matter is exacerbated by the requirement of permanent residents (who are not even citizens) to perform NS. In the eyes of the Government, the loyalty of Singaporean Malays to their country is suspect. The thought of not being trusted by one's government does much damage to the collective psyche of Singaporean Malays who identify themselves, first and foremost, as Singaporeans. Such a view is echoed by *Suara Musyawarah*:

> It is clear that the Malay/Muslim community has a strong sense of belonging to Singapore. For some, this is due to a sense of history and heritage. For others, especially the young, this is a given—they have grown up in this country, and many of their experiences, from school to national service, are shared with other Singaporeans.

Rather than address issues of national security, the policy of restricting Malays from the army alienates the Malay community and breeds resentment among its members. It tears at the nation's social and political fabric, impeding the development of a truly multi-ethnic and united people. Defence of our nation is a shared responsibility of all citizens. Institutionalised racism in the armed forces begets institutionalised racism in all other aspects of Singaporean life.

In the event of an armed conflict where, in the words of Lee Kuan Yew and Lee Hsien Loong, the emotions of a soldier comes into conflict with his religion, it is not only the Malay soldier that the nation must be careful of but also the entire community of Malays on the island. In practical terms, how will Singapore fight a war with Malay-Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia if we cannot depend on Singaporean Malays to fight alongside us? Is the Government going to force half-a-million Malays in Singapore into internment camps like what the US did to Japanese Americans during World War II? If not, then how do we, if we so distrust our fellow citizens to the extent that we prohibit them from the military, deal with Malay-Muslims within our borders while fighting Malay-Muslims outside?

The solution to this potential danger is to ensure that Malays in Singapore, or for that matter Singaporeans of any ethnic background, remain loyal to the country in the event of any conflict. We can best ensure this by cultivating a strong Singaporean identity where Singaporeans—regardless of race or religion—relate to each other more than they relate to peoples of other cultures and nationalities. Policies that discriminate undermine such an objective. The irony is that the exclusion of Malay Singaporeans in the SAF works against the national security of Singapore.

In fact, it is the PAP Government that is threatening to undo national cohesion among Singaporeans by adopting an overly liberal immigration policy. With the high influx of foreign nationals into the country—almost 40 percent of the population in Singapore is non-Singaporean—Singaporeans complain that they feel alienated and have become strangers in their own country. In such a scenario, loyalty to the country diminishes which, in turn, endangers the morale of our NS men who are called to defend the country in a war. Also, with such a high proportion of nationals from our neighbouring countries, Singapore's national security is greatly jeopardised if conflict with one of these countries arises.

As a historical note, it was an offence for employers to recruit male workers before they

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37 *Lee Kuan Yew urges Muslims to 'be less strict'*, AFP, Jan 23, 2011,
   http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hmM9iHjTTGwAC-MZv19__oNqX3zw?
   docId=CNG.4f8b988b9ebd1a5c9a9eba1574013bc8.b81

completed NS. Such being the case, many Malay youths found themselves unable to secure jobs because in the early stages they were not called up for NS. They were shunned by prospective employers who feared prosecution.[38] Unable to find employment, many turned to drugs which may have contributed to the disproportionately high percentage of drug abusers among Malays.

3.2 Housing

Housing in Singapore has become increasingly expensive especially in the last decade or so. Although such a development impacts the public across ethnic groups (according to the *Population Census Report 2010*, all ethnic groups saw a decrease in overall home-ownership[39]), it has disproportionately hit Malay families hardest as they are the ones who are predominant in the lower income bracket. Nearly 98 percent of Malays in Singapore live in Housing and Development Board (HDB) flats and almost one-third live in 1-, 2- and 3-room flats.[40]

Housing in Singapore consumes a disproportionate sum of Singaporeans' income and retirement savings (most Singaporeans use a significant portion of the Central Provident Funds to pay for their housing mortgage). This puts much financial pressure on flat owners especially those from the lower-income groups. Retirees also have little or no income because of their use of their pension savings to purchase homes. Given that the Singa-porean population is also ageing rapidly, working adults will not only have their children to provide for but will also have their retired parents to take care of.

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38 Diane K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics Under the People's Action Party,* London: Routledge, 2002, 109.
39 *Population Census Report 2010.*
40 Cited in *Suara Musyawarah Report.*

The Malay community is further disadvantaged by the Singapore Government's policy of forcible integration, or the Ethnic Integration Program (EIP). The EIP was introduced ostensibly to promote racial integration and harmony and to "prevent the formation of racial enclaves by ensuring a balanced ethnic mix among the various ethnic communities living in

public housing estates."[41]

Racial harmony and multi-racialism is, of course, desirable—but the government's stance of restricting where families of the different races can live is—motivated by other reasons as well. Indeed, the EIP's bizarre definition of what constitutes an "ethnic enclave" suggests a different motivation. For example, a neighbourhood which has 23 percent Malays, 75 percent Chinese and 2 percent Indians would be considered a Malay enclave.[42] The resultant fragmenting of Malay families across different neighbourhoods suppresses the political voice of the Malay community which is believed to be less inclined to the PAP. By preventing its members from forming a significant voting block in any constituency, the Malay community cannot elect its representatives. As a result, the interests of the Malay community are frequently ignored and unrepresented. This weakens the ability of the Malay community from protecting themselves against unfair treatment and discrimination.

The EIP also prevents Malay families from getting the best value for their apartments should they want to sell their property especially in cases of divorce, financial emergency or other unforeseen reasons. This further adversely affects the political and economic interest of Malays.

Even leaving aside the significant costs of the EIP, there are reasons to be sceptical about its efficacy in promoting multi-racialism. Home is a place where families return after a day's work. Time is spent with loved ones behind closed doors. In the living and working conditions of today's society, contact and socialisation with one's neighbours is minimal. The community spirit cannot be kindled just because we make the races live next to each other. The idea that racial harmony can be achieved by sharing an occasional elevator ride with a member of a different race is at variance with reality.

Integration and multiracialism needs to be considered from a holistic viewpoint, not just limiting the number of Malays living in the various housing estates. Removing racial discriminatory practices and establishing social, economic and educational policies that bring Singaporeans together—such as those advocated in this paper—are a good start to promoting greater integration among the various ethnic groups in Singapore. Existing policies that continue to marginalise the Malay community in the various sectors, makes it clear that the Government has failed to take meaningful steps towards achieving unity and among the races. The few measures that are in place to promote integration—ostensibly the EIP—have been misguided and need to be abolished.

3.3 Employment discrimination

Workplace discrimination is becoming a worrying trend. As the number of foreigners have established businesses in Singapore, many of these employers have signaled that they prefer to hire fellow foreigners especially those from their native countries.[43] In turn, Malay Singaporeans have encountered employers who they say have discriminated against them.

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41 *Ethnic Integration Policy & SPR quota*, HDB website,
http://www.hdb.gov.sg/fi10/fi10322p.nsf/w/SellFlatEthnicIntegrationPolicy_EIP
42 http://www.hdb.gov.sg/fi10/fi10296p.nsf/PressReleases/C515273FA068DD58482576DD00169155?
OpenDocument#
43 *Government 'does not entirely reject' workplace anti-discrimination laws*, Straits Times, 20 May 2013.

Businesses, in job advertisements and interviews, indicate that the position is only open to non-Malay employees, often citing the need for specific language skills even though the jobs do not require such skills. The need for anti-discrimination in the employment sector is apparent.

3.4 SDP's Alternative Policies

The SDP proposes the following policies to end discrimination and build a just society for both the Malay community and for Singapore:

3.4.1 *End discrimination in the SAF*. The SDP will open up all branches of the armed forces to able-bodied young males of all races or background who are citizens of Singapore. To achieve this objective, the government will set up the SAF Commission for Integration (SAFCI) to ensure that the selection of commissioned and non-commissioned officers and the system of posting officers to the various military units and vocations are carried out on a performance-based system regardless of race or religion.

3.4.2 *Enact the Fair Employment Act*. While it is acknowledged that employment discrimination does not lend itself to easy identification and that employers may often have legitimate reasons not to hire an Malay applicant for reasons other than his/her race, it is nevertheless important that anti-discrimination legislation be enacted. The key points to include in such legislation should include provisions that require employers to implement employment equity by:

- identifying and eliminating employment barriers against persons of certain groups including race,
- eliminating practices that require job applicants to identify their race, language or religion unless demonstrably necessary,
- prohibiting employers from requiring language skills of potential employees when there is no necessity to do so,
- establishing a tribunal to ensure that complaints are adjudicated.

3.4.3 *Implement the NOM scheme.* To overcome the problem of unaffordable public housing cost, the SDP has introduced a double-tiered system: Open Market (OM) and Non-Open Market (NOM) schemes. The OM scheme is essentially the system that exists presently, that is, flat owners buy their Build-To-Order (BTO) flats at current prices (which include the cost of land). They are also allowed sell their flats in the open market to willing buyers. The NOM scheme, on the other hand, allows buyers to purchase their flats at a steeply reduced rate from the HDB. This is possible because prices NOM flats do not include the cost of land. As the name suggests, however, NOM flat owners cannot sell their flats in the open market, they have to sell them back to the HDB minus the depreciation value. The advantage of the NOM scheme is that it frees up the capital
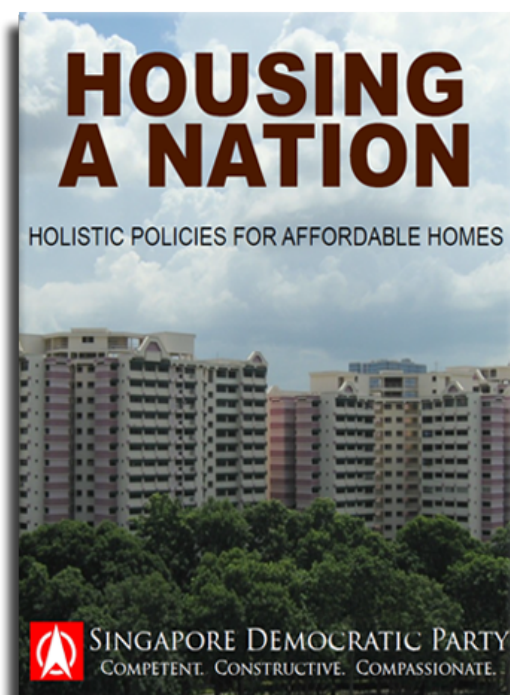
(both from bank loans and/or CPF funds) of home owners for other types of investment, retirement or education. De-tails of this double-tiered system can be read in the SDP's *Housing A Nation: Sound Policies For Affordable Homes*.

3.4.4 *Abolish the EIP.* Singaporeans should be free to live where they choose, the Government should not dictate where its citizens live. In line with the SDP's Young Family Priority Scheme (YFPS), young couples who have children under 12 or who are expecting children would be given priority to buy their flats. The couple's ethnic background will not be a factor in the allocation of flats. Similarly, a couple wishing to re-sell their flat under the SDP's Open-Market scheme should be able to do so according to supply and demand, not the couple's race.

4. Malay Organisations

In 1992, the Government mooted the idea of self-help organisations to help less successful individuals. This would be organised along racial lines. As a result, the Chinese Development Assistance Council, Yayasan Mendaki, Singapore Indian Development Association, and the Eurasian Association were established or co-opted into the initiative. The thinking was that Singaporeans would be more willing to provide assistance to individuals of their own race.

Such an outlook drives the wedge further between the ethnic groups and creates greater imbalance between the resources available to the groups. By sheer volume, the Chinese would be better funded. Mendaki, on the other hand, would have a significantly smaller pool from which contributions are drawn[44] even though the needs of the Malay community may be proportionately larger. For the Malays, besides Yayasan Mendaki, there are also MUIS and the AMP which render assistance to vulnerable members of the Malay community.

4.1 Mendaki

Mendaki was first set up by Malay-Muslim community leaders and organisations more than 30 years ago. Its primary mission is to raise the level of education of Malays. Unfortunately, like many other Malay organisations in Singapore, Mendaki is heavily influenced by and placed under the control of the PAP Government. The Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs chairs its board of directors and manages the workings of the organisation. Several other PAP MPs are also members of the board.

Given such an overwhelming presence of the PAP within its ranks, Mendaki has become politicised. The result has been an organisation unable to pursue its original objectives. After more than 30 years of Mendaki's existence, the majority of Malays are still lagging in the educational sector. For example, 88 percent of the Primary 1 cohort of Malay students don't make it to post-secondary education compared to 75 percent 10 years ago.[45] Although the percentage has been increasing, the number is still lower than the national statistic of 94 percent (from 88 percent in 2002).[46]

4.2 The Presidential Council for Minority Rights (PCMR)

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44 Contributions are on an opt-out system. Individuals who earn more than $2,000 per month would have $1.00 deducted from the salaries, those earning less that $2,000 would have $0.50 deducted.

45 Parliamentary reply, Ministry of Education, 12 November 2012, http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/parliamentary-replies/2012/11/performance-of-malay-students.php

46 *Performance by ethnic group in national examinations 2002-2011*, Ministry of Education, 29 October 2012, http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/2012/10/performance-by-ethnic-group-in.php

The PCMR is a body appointed by the President of Singapore under the advice of the cabinet. Established in 1970, its primary functions are:

a) To draw attention to any Bill or subsidiary legislation that contains differentiating measures; and
b) To consider and report on matters affecting any racial or religious community that are referred to the Council by Parliament or the Government.[47]

As of 15 July 2012, the PCMR comprise Attorney-General Steven Chong Horng Siong, Prof Chan Heng Chee, Mr Barry Desker, Mr Philip Jeyaretnam, Mr JY Pillay, Archbishop Nicholas Chia Yeck Joo, and Mr Othman bin Haron Eusofe.

Given the concerns raised by the Malay community through the decades, and the lack of remedial action taken by the authorities, it is apparent that the Council has not been effective in carrying out its duties. Despite the many instances where policies discriminate against Malays, there has been no meaningful address on these issues by the PCMR.

4.3 SDP's Alternative Policies

Organisations like the Mendaki and PCMR play an important role in helping to minimise discrimination against the Malay community. Unfortunately, restrictions and political control have meant that these organisations have been ineffective in bringing about meaningful change. Reforms in the make-up and administration of these organisations are necessary.[48]

4.3.1 *Reform funding process for self-help groups*. The current practice of ethnic groups running and funding their own self-help groups runs counter to cultivating a national spirit and identity and, as pointed out, increases the discrepancy in the amount of help the Malays receive and the problems they face.

The SDP proposes the establishment of the Committee of Singaporeans for Singaporeans (CSS) which will be tasked to determine the level of social spending needed to assist vulnerable segments of society across all ethnic groups as well as to administer the funds. Funds will be disbursed to the various community organisations, including Mendaki, based on need. These community organisations will have the task of applying the funds according to the needs of the community. Such a model transcends ethnic boundaries and ensures a more equitable allocation of finances when it comes to social assistance. It also allows organisations like Mendaki to focus on planning and implementing their agenda instead of expending resources to raise funds.

CSS's budget will be derived from the Government which will increase social spending in the annual Budget from present levels. The expenditure estimates for social spending will be presented in the SDP's forthcoming economics paper.

Members of the CSS will comprise a combination of government-appointees from civil society, academe, social enterprises, businesses, and religious organisations. They

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47 Istana website, http://www.istana.gov.sg/content/istana/news/pressreleases/2012/appointments_to_presidentialcouncilforminorityrights.html

48 While the SDP recognises that some members of the Malay-Muslim community have cited problems regarding MUIS' relations with the Government, we feel that the subject, being a religious matter, is better tackled by the Malay-Muslim community.

will be subject to parliamentary confirmation and oversight.

4.3.2 *Reform Mendaki leadership structure*. The current structure where the Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs chairs the board of directors of Mendaki unnecessarily politicises the organisation and renders its decision-making process less than optimal. Mendaki's governing body (and, for that matter, the governing bodies of all community organisations which receive state funding) will be nominated on a two-year term by civil society organisations (such as AMP), academe (RIMA), religious groups (MUIS), business associations, etc. Again, this should be subject to a confirmation process by Parliament. Mendaki should also open more branches in housing estates improve the organisation's accessibility.

4.3.3 *PCMR accountable to Parliament*. Members of the PCMR will be nominated by the President after every Presidential election but confirmed by Parliament through a public hearing process. The Council will be answerable to Parliament.

A SINGAPORE FOR ALL SINGAPOREANS:
ADDRESSING THE CONCERNS OF THE MALAY COMMUNITY

SINGAPORE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Conclusion

The SDP is committed towards building a truly democratic and progressive multicultural nation wherein every citizen, irrespective of race, would be proud to call him or herself a Singaporean. The party regards the problems faced by the Malay community not as a communal issue to be tackled by only its members, but rather a national issue with implications for all Singaporeans.

Left unattended, the problems that beset our Malay-Muslim citizens will worsen and the unhappiness of the community will breed even stronger resentment. The status quo is detrimental to the future well-being and progress of our nation. It is for this reason that the SDP draws up this alternative policy paper and encourages the study of the issues at the national level.

The final analysis is that as a nation, we must live up to our solemn pledge of building a one united people regardless of race, language or religion. In presenting this paper, the SDP strives to create a Singaporean people who, while celebrating our diversity, remain indivisible in our nationality.