



Research Office  
Legislative Council Secretariat

## Fact Sheet

# Singapore: parliament, political scene and selected policies

FSC13/2024

- This **Fact Sheet** provides information on Singapore regarding:
  - (1) Parliament and political scene; and
  - (2) Selected policies.

(1) Parliament and political scene	
(a) Political background	
Government leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The incumbent <b>Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong</b> (李顯龍) announced in mid-April 2024 that he will relinquish his office on 15 May 2024, and he will formally advise the President to appoint Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance <b>Lawrence Wong</b> (黃循財) to succeed him.</li><li>• The new Prime Minister will be <b>sworn in at 8 pm on 15 May 2024</b>.</li><li>• Lawrence Wong was selected as the new leader of the People's Action Party ("PAP" 人民行動黨)'s fourth-generation ("4G") team in April 2022, and was subsequently promoted to Deputy Prime Minister in June 2022 (alongside <b>Heng Swee Keat</b> (王瑞杰)) while concurrently serving as Minister for Finance.</li></ul>
(b) Parliament	
Composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Singapore has a <b>104-seat unicameral</b> legislature, <b>Parliament of Singapore</b>, modelled after the Westminster system of parliamentary democracy. The main functions of the Parliament of Singapore include:<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>(i) making laws for Singapore;</li><li>(ii) undertaking a critical/inquisitorial role to check on the actions and policies of the government; and</li><li>(iii) scrutinizing public finances by mandating the government to seek parliamentary approval for its annual budget.</li></ol></li></ul>

<b>(1) Parliament and political scene (cont'd)</b>	
<b>(b) Parliament (cont'd)</b>	
Composition (cont'd)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Seah Kian Peng (謝健平)</b> has been elected as the <b>Speaker</b> in August 2023. The Speaker is assisted by two <b>Deputy Speakers, Christopher de Souza</b> and <b>Jessica Tan Soon Neo (陳舜娘)</b>. All three are members of PAP.</li> <li>• The Parliament of Singapore comprises three categories of Members, namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) <b>Elected Members</b>: forming the bulk of seats in the parliament (see page 3 for details on electoral system);</li> <li>(ii) <b>Nominated Members (“NMPs”)</b>: appointment of up to 9 non-partisan individuals with distinguished performance in various fields to ensure a wider representation of the community views. NMPs are appointed by the President of Singapore for a term of two and a half years on the <b>recommendation of a Special Select Committee of the parliament chaired by the Speaker</b>; and</li> <li>(iii) <b>Non-Constituency Members (“NCMPs”)</b>: appointment of up to 12 members from unsuccessful opposition/independent candidates who obtained the highest percentage of votes in a general election. The appointment of NCMPs is to ensure diverse views can be expressed in the Parliament.<sup>1</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>• NMPs cannot vote on budget or appropriation bills, bills to amend the Constitution, motions of no confidence in the government, and motions to remove the President of Singapore from office.</li> </ul>
Current party division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The current composition of the parliament is as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) 87 elected Members, comprising 79 PAP Members and 8 Workers’ Party Members;</li> <li>(ii) 9 NMPs not connected to any political parties; and</li> <li>(iii) 2 NCMPs from the Progress Singapore Party.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Meanwhile, there are currently 6 vacant seats in the Parliament.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (Amendment) Act 2016, commenced in April 2017, raises the maximum number of NCMPs from 9 to 12, and gives them the same voting rights as Elected Members.

(1) Parliament and political scene (cont'd)	
(b) Parliament (cont'd)	
Electoral system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The parliament has 93 Elected Members chosen directly by first-past-the-post voting in 31 constituencies. These Members are elected either from:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) 14 Single Member Constituencies that return 14 seats; or</li> <li>(ii) 17 Group Representation Constituencies (“GRCs”) that return a total of 79 seats.</li> </ul> </li> <li>To stand for GRCs, political parties should field three to six candidates in a particular constituency, with at least one candidate belonging to the Malay, Indian or other minority communities to ensure minority groups are represented in the parliament.</li> <li>Each elector can vote for one party list, and the list with the most votes wins all the seats in that GRC.</li> <li>A <b>parliamentary election is held once every five years</b> (the last election was held in July 2020) unless the parliament is dissolved earlier by the President of Singapore on the advice of the Prime Minister.</li> </ul>
Meet-the-people sessions (“MPS”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MPS were reportedly conceived in 1955 by Chief Minister David Marshall during colonial Singapore and have since served as channels for Members of the Singaporean Parliament to stay connected with their constituents and understand the ground sentiments.</li> <li>MPS are typically conducted on a <b>weekly basis</b> at the Members’ constituency offices, and are <b>generally organized in the format of one-to-one meetings</b> according to information gathered from desktop research. They provide local residents with the chance to seek advice or assistance on a range of community issues and even personal financial matters (e.g. employment, social welfare and housing assistance).</li> <li>A Legislative Council delegation that visited Singapore in 2004 observed MPS conducted by a Member of the Singaporean Parliament in her constituency.</li> </ul>

<b>(1) Parliament and political scene (cont'd)</b>	
<b>(c) Executive Branch</b>	
Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Singapore has a parliamentary government system.</li> <li>• The current <b>President of Singapore</b><sup>2</sup> is <b>Tharman Shanmugaratnam</b> (尚達曼), who previously served as the Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore and the Chairman of the Monetary Authority of Singapore. He was elected to the post in September 2023.</li> <li>• The Executive power is exercised by the Cabinet, which is led by the Prime Minister and is responsible to the Parliament.</li> <li>• There are currently 19 members in the Cabinet including the Prime Minister and other 18 Ministers.</li> </ul>
<b>(d) Judicial Branch</b>	
Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ordinary courts are divided into 3 instances, the <b>State Courts</b>, the <b>Family Justice Courts</b> and the <b>Supreme Court</b>.</li> <li>• The <b>State Courts</b> consist of District Courts and Magistrates' Courts and specialized courts such as the Coroner's Court, Community Court, Traffic Court, the Primary Dispute Resolution Centre and the Small Claims Tribunal.</li> <li>• The <b>Family Justice Courts</b> comprise the Youth Courts, the Family Courts and the Family Division of the High Court.</li> <li>• The <b>Supreme Court</b> consists of the High Court and the Court of Appeal, and is composed of a <b>Chief Justice</b> and 11 Judges.</li> <li>• The High Court has unlimited original jurisdiction in both civil and criminal cases, while the Court of Appeal is the final appellate court.</li> <li>• The <b>Chief Justice</b> is appointed by the President of Singapore. Judges and judicial commissioners are appointed by the President on the consultation of the Chief Justice.</li> <li>• There is a <b>Singapore International Commercial Court</b>, which is a division of the High Court, to deal with litigation arising from cross-border trade and investment.</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> As the Head of State, the President is the figure representing Singapore at ceremonies domestically and internationally.

Duties and powers of the President include: (i) opening each Session of Parliament and delivering an address laying out the key priorities of the government; (ii) officiating swearing-in ceremonies of key appointment holders such as the Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, the Chief Justice and Judges of the Supreme Court; and (iii) being empowered to veto government budgets and key public appointments if there are reasons to do so (the President is advised by the Council of Presidential Advisers on such matters).

(2) Selected policies	
(a) “Forward Singapore”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The <b>Forward Singapore Report</b> was published in October 2023, outlining the following <b>seven key shifts</b> that will “ensure that the broad middle of society and their children see improvements in their lives” and that the community can “continue to care for society’s most vulnerable”:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) embrace learning beyond grades (i.e. lifelong learning);</li> <li>(ii) respect and reward every job;</li> <li>(iii) support families through every stage of life;</li> <li>(iv) enable seniors to age well (including staying active and socially connected);</li> <li>(v) empower those in need by uplifting lower-income families;</li> <li>(vi) invest in a shared tomorrow; and</li> <li>(vii) residents do their part as one united people.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
(b) Budget 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Singapore announced its Budget Statement in January 2024, outlining its economic strategy and introducing new economic measures.</li> <li>The document highlighted that while growth was essential to deliver collective well-beings for Singaporeans, there is “<b>a limit to how fast the growth can be due to land, labour and carbon constraints</b>”. Focusing on improving productivity<sup>3</sup> and innovation, the economy is expected to <b>achieve a moderate annual growth of about 2%-3% over the next decade</b>.</li> <li>Also introduced in the Budget is a new <b>Refundable Investment Credit</b> (“RIC”) to boost investment. RIC will come with a refundable cash feature and the qualifying economic activities for this new scheme include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) investment on new productive capacity;</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> Budget initiatives to improve workforce productivity include offering (i) those aged at or above 40 extra training credits of S\$4,000 (HK\$23,400) to enrol in selected training programmes, and up to S\$3,000 (HK\$17,500) monthly employment subsidies; and (ii) Institute of Technical Education graduates aged 30 and below a S\$5,000 (HK\$29,200) top-up to their individual Post-Secondary Education Accounts (to pay for post-secondary education available for eligible Singaporeans) if they enrol in diploma programmes, and a further S\$10,000 (HK\$58,500) top-up to their Central Provident Fund account if they attain their diplomas.

<b>(2) Selected policies (cont'd)</b>	
(b) Budget 2024 (cont'd)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(ii) expanding or establishing the scope of activities in digital services, professional services and supply chain management;</li> <li>(iii) expanding or establishing headquarter activities;</li> <li>(iv) setting up or expanding activities by commodity trading firms;</li> <li>(v) carrying out research and development (“R&amp;D”) and innovation activities; and</li> <li>(vi) implementing solutions with decarbonation objectives.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under RIC, companies with qualifying expenditures such as capital expenditure and manpower costs will receive up to 50% financial support. The credit will be offset against profit tax, with <b>unutilized credits converted to cash refund</b>. Further details of RIC will be <b>announced in the third quarter of 2024</b>.</li> </ul>
(c) Innovation and technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To sustain R&amp;D investment,<sup>4</sup> the Singaporean government will invest S\$3 billion (HK\$18 billion) more in its <b>Research, Innovation and Enterprise (“RIE”)</b> five-year plan launched in 2020, on top of the original S\$25 billion (HK\$146 billion) commitment, with a focus on supporting advanced manufacturing, digital economy and healthcare.</li> <li>• On <b>National artificial intelligence (“AI”) Strategy 2.0</b>,<sup>5</sup> Over S\$1 billion (HK\$5.85 billion) will be invested over the next five years into AI compute, talent, and industry development. Part of it will be invested on securing access to the advanced chips crucial to AI development.</li> </ul>
(d) Housing and land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) <u>Housing policy and land supply for private residential units</u></li> <li>• The Housing &amp; Development Board (“HDB” 建屋局) is Singapore’s <b>public housing authority</b> under the Ministry of National Development.</li> <li>• Public housing provided by HDB are homes to <b>over 80% of Singapore’s resident population</b>, among whom 90% own their home. HDB provides <b>both subsidized sale units (“HDB flats” 組屋)</b> and <b>public rental housing for lower-income households</b>.</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> Overall expenditures on R&D of Singapore amounted to about 2.2% of GDP in 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Singapore published the National AI Strategy in 2019 and established the National AI Office under the Smart Nation and Digital Government Office.



## (2) Selected policies (cont'd)

### (d) Housing and land (cont'd)

- HDB adopts a balloting system for allocation of subsidized sale units, and a noticeable portion of flats are **reserved for first-time buyers under priority schemes for selected types of families** (e.g. young families, married persons who wish to live with or near their parents, and families consist of at least 3 children).
- In the **private housing market, residential unit prices continued to trend upward** and rose by 6.8% in 2023, after increases of 10.6% and 8.6% in 2021 and 2022 respectively.
- The Singaporean government has **ramped up housing supply via the Government Land Sales (“GLS”)** programme. The supply of private housing from the GLS Programme in 2023 has been increased significantly by around 50% to 9 250 units.

#### (ii) Development of business parks

- Before Singapore’s independence, the Economic Development Board in the early 1960s already started developing Singapore’s first industrial estate – Jurong (裕廊) Industrial Estate. The predecessor of **JTC Corporation (“JTC”)**, Jurong Town Corporation, was set up in 1968 as a specialist agency to take over as Singapore’s principal developer and manager of industrial estates and their related facilities.
- JTC and development of business parks played vital roles in Singapore’s evolving industrial sector. For instance, JTC started developing facilities for oil refineries on three of the islands south of Jurong in the mid-1970s as Singapore’s economy diversified into the petrochemical industry; at the start of the 21st century, JTC began the development of **One-North** (緯壹科技城) in Buona Vista (波那維斯達), to support the growth of the science and technology, biomedical, information technology and media industries in Singapore.

## (2) Selected policies (cont'd)

(e) Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Singapore will see the full implementation of a <b>significant reform to its secondary school curriculum in 2024</b>. Students entering Secondary 1 this year will <b>no longer be subject to streaming</b> into Normal and Express (i.e. more demanding) streams.</li><li>• Instead, subject-based banding will be put in place where students can <b>customize their education at the subject level</b>, with three academic levels (G1 to G3, which ranks from the least demanding to the most demanding) to choose from for individual subjects, <b>rather than at the level as dictated by streaming</b> in the past. With streaming no longer in place, <b>students will also be in mixed form classes where they can interact with peers of different strengths and interests</b>.</li><li>• Moreover, new Secondary 1 this year will be the first cohort to sit the <b>new common Singapore-Cambridge Secondary Education Certificate examinations</b> in 2027.<sup>6</sup> As in the current system, after completing Secondary 4 or Secondary 5, students can choose to proceed to Junior Colleges/Centralised Institute (for pre-university education), polytechnics, and Institute of Technical Education, among other education options.</li></ul>
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<sup>6</sup> In the past, students from different streams will lead to different examinations.

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Note: ^ Internet resources listed in this section were accessed in May 2024.