SINGAPORE MODEL CABINET

Cabinet C - Society

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[18th March 2026-20th March 2026]

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Letter to Representatives

Dear Representatives,

Welcome to Cabinet C! The chairs warmly welcome you as we engage in 3 days of rigorous study, debate, and negotiation.

We would like to stipulate the purpose of the council, our mandate, and goals. The Cabinet convenes on pressing matters that substantially affect Singaporeans. Its composition consists of relevant ministries and statutory boards, and its members are crucial to the enactment of inclusive and targeted policies. Furthermore, the Cabinet aims to reflect real-world governance where trade-offs are unavoidable, introducing representatives to the realities of policymaking.

This year, the Cabinet will be discussing two topics that are highly relevant to Singaporean society today – Singapore's standing at international sporting events, as well as Singapore's emergency preparedness for future health crises, in light of the recent COVID-19. Singapore's standing at international sporting events is important to several aspects of Singaporean society as these events provide an avenue by which Singapore can gain soft power and international recognition, as well as economic and social benefits. Emergency preparedness is also crucial to Singaporean society today, given the relatively recent COVID-19 and the current Nipah virus, because these international health crises can potentially threaten Singapore, a small, highly globalised state that is subjected to the constant movement of trade and people. Hence, preparedness for the next crisis is not just about flattening the infection curve, but also about preventing the fracturing of society that may arise due to the weight of prolonged fear and restriction.

An effective government must first understand its role and, by extension, its mandates. Some mandates of the government include: economic growth and competitiveness, social
cohesion, as well as sustainability.

The objective of the Cabinet is to address these pressing societal issues while managing and mitigating trade-offs, eventually culminating in Draft Cabinet Memorandum. As representatives, the onus of representing competing priorities and engaging in diplomatic negotiations falls upon you. The chairs are excited to see substantive debate during the conference, but also wish to see you grow as representatives and as people.

So speak, write, and argue to glean as much as possible from Singapore Model Cabinet 2026!

Best Regards,
Lauren, Yash, Megan, and Keisha
Chairs of Cabinet C
Singapore Model Cabinet 2026

Chair Introductions

Lauren is a second-year Arts student at Victoria Junior College who juggles memorising content in China Studies in English (CSE), History, Economics, as well as Mathematics. She first ventured into the world of Model United Nations through an interest in geopolitics, tactical negotiations (through watching Obi Wan Kenobi in Star Wars), as well as policies that shape societal governance. When not being stressed about academics (aka 99% of the time), Lauren enjoys listening to movie songs, taking pictures of various flora and fauna (namely her dog) across the world, as well as reading anything that catches her eye. She hopes that through Singapore Model Cabinet 2026, representatives will learn how to engage in productive discussion and strategic negotiations to unite diverse viewpoints, and ultimately enjoy themselves!

Yash is a second-year Science student at Victoria Junior College, navigating the thrilling world of Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, and Economics. He first dipped his toes into Model United Nations three years ago, craving a break from textbooks and formulas—only to discover a passion for sharp debates and global chaos. Now, as a chair for Singapore Model Cabinet (SMC) 2026, he crafts study guides with the precision of a pit stop crew in the midst of a Formula 1 race. Outside of SMC, Yash lives for the roar of engines, glued to Formula 1 races and bleeding Ferrari red through every heartbreaking season. Calm and collected, he hopes SMC representatives leave with new friendships, unforgettable memories, and the kind of fun that makes late-night research worth it.

Megan is a second-year student at Victoria Junior College who takes Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, and Literature. She started wanting to learn more about Model United Nations (MUNs) because of her growing interest in global affairs. In her free time, Megan likes to play rhythm games, and spend time with her friends. She hopes that everyone will have an awesome time sharing their own perspectives, gaining new ones, and forging lasting friendships at Singapore Model Cabinet 2026!

Keisha is a second-year student at Victoria Junior College, currently balancing Chemistry, Biology, Economics, and Mathematics. Keisha's journey into the world of Model United Nations (MUN) began in 2025.She finds current affairs very fascinating and as part of her MUN journey, she also strengthened both her critical thinking and public speaking skills.When left with time to spare, Keisha can be seen spending time with her family and friends, watching a new show, or drawing. Through Singapore Model Cabinet 2026 she hopes representatives will leave with newly found confidence, knowledge, and strong friendships formed from the conference.

Topic 1: Should Singapore take more steps to improve its standing at international sporting events?

Background of Topic

1. Sports' Importance for Nation - Building

In the context of Singapore's nation-building narrative, sport has never been viewed merely as a recreational pursuit or a test of physical prowess. Rather, it is linked to social cohesion and the construction of a shared Singaporean identity (Chan, 2015). Since our independence in 1965, the government has utilized sport as a strategic method to bridge racial, religious, and socioeconomic divides, aiming to foster a society capable of survival in a volatile region (Chan, 2015).

This philosophy was most visibly reflected when Singaporeans performed the "Kallang Roar" in the 1970s and 1980s, a phenomenon where tens of thousands of Singaporeans of all backgrounds gathered at the old National Stadium to cheer for our Lions, the nation's football team (National Library Board, 2014). The Kallang Roar remains a powerful symbol of how international sporting representation can rouse a young nation, creating a collective memory that transcends the diverse segments of Singaporean society (National Library Board, 2014).

However, the role of sport in society has evolved with the introduction of more communal sporting programmes. These communal programmes serve as the necessary foundation for elite success now that the concept of social cohesion has shifted from the Rugged Society's focus on survival to a modern emphasis on inclusivity and integration across class and ability lines (Chan, 2015). Today, it is formalized through Vision 2030, a master plan launched back in 2012 with the mantra "Live Better Through Sport". While Vision 2030 explicitly frames sport as a means for social integration and resilience (Sport Singapore, 2012), a tension has emerged between the goal of "mass participation" (health and bonding) and "high performance" (diplomatic prestige and national pride)(Sport Singapore, 2012; Fang, 2021). Vision 2030 seeks to achieve better performances at international sporting competitions by indirectly widening the participation base through initiatives like ActiveSG where the state creates a talent pipeline where gifted athletes like Shanti Pereira (discovered through school sports) or Yip Pin Xiu can be identified and funneled into high-performance pathways (MCCY, 2026).

2. The Shift from Community to Corporatization

Singapore's sporting history reflects the broader societal shifts. In the post-independence era (1960s–1970s), the focus was described by the egalitarian phrase: Sports for All. The introduction of Pesta Sukan (Festival of Sports) in 1964 prioritized friendly, amateur competition and helped build neighborliness between nations (National Library Board, 2016). As such, International success was a byproduct, and not a Key Performance Indicator (KPI). On top of these, the hosting of the 1973 Southeast Asian Peninsular (SEAP) Games at the newly built National Stadium was a major societal milestone for the country, serving as a coming-of-age party for Singaporeans and reinforcing a sense of sovereign capability (National Library Board, 2014).

By the 1990s, as Singapore entered the ranks of developed nations, the societal approach to sport shifted towards meritocracy and professionalism —the “Sports for Excellence” era. Recognizing the benefits of global visibility, the state began structuring elite pathways. This era introduced the controversial Foreign Sports Talent (FST) Scheme in 1993, which recruited foreign athletes to represent Singapore (Lee, 2020). While this yielded medals, including a silver in Table Tennis at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, it sparked a deep societal backlash. The debate over the FST scheme revealed a fracture in Singapore’s national identity as Singaporeans questioned whether “bought” glory contributed to national pride or only inflated statistics. This historical episode was an important learning point for the committee, as it highlighted the risks of prioritizing international standing over organic representation (Ang, 2014).

The modern phase (2010–Present) attempts to reconcile these tensions by focusing on an indigenous High-Performance Ecosystem. The establishment of the Singapore Sports School in 2004, and the Sports Excellence Scholarship (spexScholarship) signaled a shift toward grooming "homegrown" talent who could genuinely inspire society (MCCY, 2023). This approach was justified in 2016 when Joseph Schooling won Singapore’s first Olympic Gold. While Joseph Schooling’s 2016 gold provided a powerful narrative, critics often viewed it as a private success story due to his overseas training. A more direct product of the local ecosystem is sprint queen Shanti Pereira, whose historic 2023 Asian Games success is credited to the structured support of the Singapore Sports School and the spexScholarship (MCCY, 2023). However, the high of 2016 was difficult to sustain, with the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games resulting in a medal-less campaign for Singapore. This suggests that earlier victories may have been individual anomalies rather than a sign of a consistent, high-output medal factor*y* (Lee, 2021). Ultimately, as the nation celebrates SG60 in 2025, the government is pushing the "Kallang Alive" master plan to rejuvenate the national stadium precinct, hoping to recreate the communal spirit of the 1970s (Sport Singapore, 2025).

3. Current Sporting Landscape and Hosting Success

Currently, Singapore is steadily investing in sports development. However, the country’s performance at global competitions could be improved. Singapore won no medals at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, ending a streak of podium finishes from 2008 (Fang, 2021). Nonetheless, Team Singapore has achieved historic successes such as Joseph Schooling’s 2016 Olympic gold, and more recently, the 17-year-old Maximilian Maeder’s bronze in kiteboarding at Paris 2024, making him Singapore’s youngest Olympic medallist (MCCY, 2024). Since 2017, Singapore has averaged 52 gold medals per SEA Games, up from 38 the previous decade. At the 2023 SEA and ASEAN Para Games, Singapore won over 200 medals in total (MCCY, 2024).

Besides focusing on athlete development, Singapore aims to host sporting events, bringing world-class competitions to local audiences and giving athletes opportunities at their home country. To anchor Singapore’s position as a premier destination for sports, the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) has institutionalized financial support through the creation of the Major Sports Events Fund (MSEF). The MSEF was established with a budget of $165 million allocated over four years. It supports world-class sporting events and contributes to Singapore's vision of becoming a global sports hub, playing a crucial role in shaping Singapore’s sporting future and its spot on the world stage (Sport Singapore, 2025). A Sport Singapore (SportSG) spokesperson said the fund will enable the governing body “to more

proactively pursue discussions with event owners such as international sport federations, and attract them to host their major events in Singapore" (Ganesan, 2024).

The objectives of the MSEF are: (a) enhancing Singapore's global sports profile, (b) boosting local sports participation by providing them with opportunities to witness world-class sporting action firsthand, (c) giving Singapore national athletes opportunities to compete internationally, (d) contributing to economic growth as major sporting events attract international visitors which generate economic activity, and (e) fostering innovation in event hosting (Sport Singapore, 2025).

In 2023, this fund has successfully funded high-profile events such as the inaugural Olympic Esports Week, the Professional Triathletes Organisation (PTO) Asian Open, Fiba 3x3 Asia Cup, World Table Tennis (WTT) Singapore Smash, HSBC Singapore Rugby Sevens and the Formula One Singapore Grand Prix (Ganesan, 2024). Similarly, Singapore's hosting of the 2025 World Aquatics Championships (WCH) in July was deemed as a success by many athletes, officials and spectators. It reflected Singapore's growing capability to host major international sporting events. The meet drew around 140,000 spectators and featured multiple world and championship records across swimming events, in a span of 24 days. Competitors and officials praised the organisation, efficiency and quality of facilities, such as the new purpose-built WCH Arena and the established OCBC Aquatic Centre. The success of this meet helps to strengthen Singapore's reputation as a venue for global sport and potentially inspiring local athletes by showcasing world-class competition on home soil (Kwek & Ganesan, 2025).

When hosting international para sports events, Singapore actively tries to increase the physical accessibility of these events. Sport Singapore works with partners to make sure that competition venues are accessible, and meet international standards for international competitions such as the World Para Swimming Championships 2025, which was held at the OCBC Aquatic Centre. The OCBC Aquatic Centre has universal design features that cater to the diverse needs of athletes and spectators such as step-free access for para-athletes at the competition venue, and dedicated wheelchair bays with lift and ramp access for spectators (MCCY, 2025).

4. Cultural Shortfalls and Structural Hurdles

Despite these logistical and financial successes, the development of an organic, self-sustaining sporting culture remains second in priority to a highly managed spectator culture (Ganesan, 2024). Singapore's pivot toward a managed spectator culture is a strategic response to its geographic and demographic constraints. By utilizing the MSEF, the state creates an immediate economic multiplier through sports tourism while simultaneously projecting an image of excellent governing to the world (Ganesan, 2024). While the MSEF has successfully turned Singapore into a premier destination for global fans, critics point to the gentrification of sports, where polished, state-managed hubs have replaced informal community spaces. For example, the closure of community-led spaces like the Changi Exhibition Centre Tarmac used for grassroots motorsport activities in favor of more commercialized venues highlights a tension between high-profile sports tourism and accessible grassroots recreation (Chan, 2022).

Despite the prestige of hosting world-class events, the "ground-level" experience of sport in Singapore remains fraught with practical challenges. While the $165 million MSEF focuses on international competitions, local participation is often hampered by the insufficient public facilities to meet the high

demand. Even with the Dual Use Scheme opening up school fields and halls to the public, the high population density means that the demand for ActiveSG facilities frequently outstrips supply, making regular training a logistical hurdle for the average citizen (Chun Wei, 2025).

Furthermore, while Singapore possesses state-of-the-art infrastructure such as the $1.3 billion Sports Hub, the nation's societal mindset remains rooted in a utilitarian view of physical activity The pervasive academic-sport dichotomy continues to facilitate a talent leak at the tertiary level, where promising athletes often abandon their sporting dreams due to the cultural perception of sport as a high-risk gamble compared to stable academic careers (Chia, 2019). Until the societal value of sport evolves from being a spectacle to watch into a career to pursue, Singapore's sporting culture will likely remain a top-down creation rather than a bottom-up, organic initiative.

Root issues of improving Singapore's standing at international sporting events

1. The Culture of Pragmatism

Singapore's ability to improve its standing is severely constrained by its unique societal values. The most pervasive barrier is the dichotomy between academics and sports. In a society that focuses heavily on academics, sport is often relegated to a hobby / pastime rather than a viable career. The cultural pressure for students to secure traditional degrees leads to a high attrition rate of talented athletes in their earlier ages (Ong, 2024). Although the Sports Excellence Scholarship offers flexible university pathways, the societal stigma persists. Parents often view full-time sports training as a high-risk gamble, creating a "talent leak" that money alone cannot fix. This has lingered throughout wushu exponent Kimberly Ong's time in the sport. Many of her national teammates were dropping out to focus on their studies. There is a societal stereotype that academics are more important than sports, and focusing on academics would be a more viable pathway. This could lead to a lot of sports talent being lost (Ong, 2024).

Furthermore, the institution of National Service (NS) presents a specific challenge for male athletes. The mandatory two-year conscription occurs during the peak physiological development window for many sports. While the Ministry of Defence has granted deferments to exceptional athletes, the criteria remain strict to maintain the societal principle of "equity"—that no individual is above the duty of defense. The case of footballer Ben Davis, who defaulted on NS in 2019 to play in the English Premier League, sparked intense debates (Mahmud, 2018). In this case, two national values clashed: the desire for global sporting representation and the commitment to equity in terms of serving NS.

Currently, Singapore's international standing leaves room for improvement. With no medals won at the Olympics in 2020, this could threaten to diminish public interest (Abdul & Brijnath, 2021). While Singapore remains a regional powerhouse at the SEA Games, its relevance on the global stage is tenuous, with 6 Olympic medals in 76 years. To counter this, the state has pivoted toward hosting as a strategy to gain more attention internationally, and increase local interest in sports (Fang, 2021). However, this strategy also carries societal risks like the gentrification of sports. There is also growing dissatisfaction on whether events like F1 benefit the average Singaporean or merely serve as entertainment for the global elite, even as community spaces like the Singapore Turf Club are closed down (Chew, 2023).

2. Demographic Realities and Future Outlook

The urgency of this topic is driven by the stark demographic data. Singapore's resident fertility rate dropped to 0.97 in 2023, signaling a shrinking youth base from which to draw talent (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2024). Unlike larger nations that can rely on a larger talent pool, Singapore's small population means every potential athlete is a precious resource. This scarcity could push the government to be more interventionist and efficient. The High Performance Sports (HPS) system currently supports over 70 athletes via the spexScholarship, providing stipends and sports science support (MCCY, n.d). However, the financial cliff remains a reality; many athletes struggle to survive in one of the world's most expensive cities without full state support, leading to accusations that elite sport is becoming a pursuit only for the wealthy. Furthermore, government efforts in this area might not suffice, as Singapore is still lacking in sponsorships from the private sector compared to other countries (Ong, 2024). In other countries with larger populations, athletes can get more attention and support. In Singapore, with a population around 6 million, and with less people interested in sports, athletes could be lesser known. Without enough popularity, brands may not sponsor them (Ong, 2024). Since Singapore's population is already small, coupled with the fact that there is lesser public interest in sports, the support athletes receive may be lesser than other countries.

3. Past Policy Initiatives and Programmes

Singapore has invested into the High Performance Sport Institute (HPSI), through merging the Singapore Sport Institute (SSI) and National Youth Sports Institute (NYSI). The intention is to create an end-to-end high performance sport pathway for athletes, parents and national sports associations (NSAs) (Sport Singapore, 2025). This is advantageous as it facilitates athlete development from youth to elite competition, preventing prospective international athletes from dropping out due to a lack of support or structure. By pooling together resources, HPSI is more accessible to a wider range of athletes, instead of the previous situation where resources were only directed at distinct groups. However, the centralised authority of the HPSI may standardize athlete development too much, which may prevent unique or specialised training methods (Faster Capital, 2025).

The Sports Excellence (Spex) Scholarship supports athlete development. This is done through monthly stipends and CPF top ups, which are advantageous as they allow athletes to be more financially secure, giving them a peace of mind so they can focus on working towards sporting excellence. Spex emphasises dual-career sustainability through SpexEducation, which partners universities to offer flexible, athlete-friendly academic arrangements and dedicated undergraduate scholarships under both dual-career and new-career study tracks. The dual career track gives athletes support so they can balance both schooling and sport, while the new-career study tracks give athletes reassurance that they can pursue other goals after their sporting career. Both of these can help athletes feel more secure in sports as a career, allowing them to develop their talents and compete internationally (Chan, 2024). All together, these are advantageous because they allow athletes to develop elite sporting excellence without compromising academic aspirations and post-sport careers (Ong, 2024). However, two undesired consequences are that (a) these athletes-scholars may feel an excessive pressure to perform on behalf of the state, leading to burnout, and that (b) this scholarship could create gaps between scholars and non-scholars, which could stifle the potential of some aspiring athletes, should not enough support be given to non-scholars.

The 2025 amendment to the Singapore Sports Council Act adds the Singapore National Paralympic Council as a Sport Singapore partner. This is advantageous because it promotes accessibility in sports, by including para sports as part of national sports. Additionally, by including mind sports and e-sports into the definition of "sports", the government recognises modern culture and keeps the sporting scene in Singapore up to date with the changing times (MCCY, 2025). This can diversify the international sports competitions that Singapore takes part in, allowing Singapore to achieve excellence in more areas, as there would be more athletes who will benefit from this inclusive approach. However it must also be recognised that when we expand the definition of "sports", resource allocation may be stretched too thinly. Traditional athletes might argue that funds are being taken away from their areas of sports, and some might ask if Singapore should instead focus on a few sports with the potential to consistently deliver medals (Ong, 2024). Thus, measures must be put in place to ensure resources are allocated in an efficient way that helps Singapore perform well internationally.

4. Projection Into The Future

Even though Singapore has progressively increased its support for the sports scene, through sporting infrastructure such as through the Kallang Alive Masterplan, more can be done. This could include (a) introducing more early exposure to sports for Singaporeans, (b) increasing national interest, (c) increasing acceptance of sports as a viable career, (d) supporting potential young athletes in balancing their studies and sports training, and (e) making sports more accessible to further widen the talent pool.

(a) Introducing more early exposure to sports for Singaporeans.

Early exposure to sports that could inspire future athletes to take part in sports at an international level, can be done through school activities or community events. This could lead to a larger talent pool which could give rise to more capable athletes to compete internationally. In particular, more attention and participation could be drawn to niche and emerging sports. For example, the inaugural Singapore Urban Sports and Fitness Festival was launched by SportSG (Ong, 2024), with the goal to encourage mass participation. This shows the Singapore government's recognising the international trends of niche sports becoming more established globally. "There are more and more (of these) going into major sports events, and I think that's a good thing," said Mr Teo. "Who knows, we may have another champion from all these activities." Expanding support for athletes in niche and uncommon sports is a viable way forward for Singapore, and gives Singaporean athletes greater opportunity to shine on the world stage (Ong, 2024).

(b) Increasing national interest and Increasing acceptance of sports as a viable career.

The Olympic Council of Asia has confirmed that Singapore will host the 32nd SEA Games in 2029 (Olympic Council of Asia, 2022), building on the success and national unity fostered during the 2015 edition. In light of this, Singapore could collaborate with partners to come up with more innovative ways to present international sporting events (Sport Singapore, 2025). This could not only give Singaporean athletes more opportunities to compete internationally, but also offer Singaporeans more opportunities to spectate international sports on home ground. This could increase national interest in the sporting scene, which could potentially change some people's view of sports as an unviable career, and start a shift in the cultural perception of sports in Singapore.

(c) Supporting potential young athletes in balancing their studies and sports training.

More support could be funneled into addressing the sports and academics dichotomy that aspiring athletes often struggle with. From young, with major exams like PSLE, O-Levels, and A-levels, many potential athletes have to juggle academic pressure and training. More flexibility could be given to students, such as by expanding the Direct School Admission (DSA) scheme, which could potentially alleviate this stress. This could lead to higher retention of talent, where athletes with the potential and drive to compete internationally can continue honing their skills, allowing them to mature into medal contenders.

(d) Making sports more accessible to further widen the talent pool.

Programmes are launched to increase the accessibility of sports on the international level, such as the Disability Sports Masterplan that aims to encourage persons with disabilities who desire and have the potential to do sports at high-performance level, by establishing a National Training Centre for para sport, establishing para sports community hubs, and growing competencies of coaches in disability sports (MCCY, 2024). This can lead to more participation in international para events as more athletes are given opportunities to develop and compete, as one of the goals of the Disability Sports Masterplan is to sustain podium success and increase the number of para athletes and sports represented at major Para Sports Championships and Major Games (MCCY, 2024).

Scopes of Debate (SODs)

SOD 1: Sports and Its Potential to Build Singapore's National Identity

One key scope of debate is the implications of international sporting success on Singapore's national pride and identity. Sporting achievements can help to reinforce the sense of shared pride and belonging, particularly in a small and ethnically diverse country like Singapore (MCCY, 2025). When our athletes succeed internationally, such moments of shared celebration can unite Singaporeans across different backgrounds, strengthening national cohesion, pride, and identity.

Enhancing Singapore's visibility during international sports also helps in building Singapore's legacy and infrastructure investments that aid in strengthening a long term sense of national identity (Tong, 2025). Investments in high-quality sport facilities, training centres, and sports science development are not only beneficial for the athletes of today but will influence how future generations perceive sports. These long-term investments imply that sport is a path that is worthwhile and legitimate within Singaporean society rather than a secondary or risky pursuit. Over time, this helps to normalise sports as a part of our national culture and identity.

International sporting events hosted in Singapore, as well as the visibility of Singaporean athletes competing on the global stage, can play a significant role in encouraging the wider community to adopt more active lifestyles. Successful athletes often serve as national role models. For instance, Singapore sailor Max Maeder's Olympic bronze medal at the Paris 2024 Games generated widespread media attention and public interest, particularly due to his young age and rapid rise in ranking at international

competitions. Such achievements reinforce the idea that sporting excellence can emerge from Singapore and inspire individuals to engage more actively in sports and exercise (Hamzah, 2024).

In addition, continued investment into elite sport also supports the development of elite athletes and creates clearer sports career pathways for Singaporeans. Stronger systems of coaching, athlete development and competition exposure make it possible for local athletes to envision sports as a viable long term profession (Thompson et.al, 2022). This contributes to Singapore's sense of national identity by redrawing its definitions of success, moving it beyond success at the academic and corporate level. As more Singaporeans find success in sports-related careers, our national narrative would embrace diverse talents and strengths.

However, there are also challenges to consider. We argue that a national identity that places too much weight on elite sporting success can place too much pressure on athletes to perform, and that excessive pressure can negatively impact their well-being (CNA, 2025). Authenticity may also be brought into question if Singapore's sports success relies on foreign-born athletes or overseas training systems and coaches. If not handled carefully, this may lead to less Singaporeans identifying with our national sporting achievements. As such, Singapore must balance our performance driven goals vis-a-vis the athletes' wellbeing and the creation of a sustainable national identity.

Overall, such international sporting achievements can contribute positively to Singapore's sense of national identity by fostering local pride, creating long term sporting legacies, and opening up new sporting career pathways. However, these benefits cannot be sustained on short term sporting achievements alone. In order to build a sustainable sense of national identity, these efforts must be bolstered by actively fostering public involvement and development regarding our athletes' participation in international sporting events.

SOD 2: Overcoming Internal Social Roadblocks and Barriers

There are various internal social factors that hamper Singapore's pursuit of international sporting excellence. These factors include the (a) dichotomy between sports and academics, (b) the friction between athlete development and equity, and (c) a smaller talent pool.

1. Juggling Academics and Sporting Excellence

One major social roadblock is the juggling of academics and sporting excellence. Singaporean society places an heavy emphasis on academic achievement, and time put into sports training to take part in international sporting events may be seen as distracting individuals from studying. Some parents still worry about putting children at risk by focusing on sports, fearing that their futures may not be as stable should they not focus on academic pursuits and follow conventional pathways of success (Ong, 2024). Hence, for young prospective international athletes, there is the struggle of juggling both academic and sporting excellence, which may discourage them from pursuing sporting excellence internationally and professionally. The various ways of assuring these youths and their parents that sports is a viable career path should be discussed.

2. National Service and Training

These tensions are more prevalent as many young, male athletes face “less than optimal conditions” at home, having to juggle school or National Service with training (Fang, 2021). National service is one of the factors that impedes Singapore’s pursuit of international sporting excellence. Singaporean athletes may face a reduction or pause in training due to having to serve in National Service. This may affect their ability to perform competitively. However, this must be balanced with the need for equity, where deferments must be handed out fairly. The criteria for deferment should be transparent and strict, as authorities must answer to the public on why an athlete is exempt while others are not. For example, Ben Davis was denied deferment from deferment as the application was said to be primarily focused on “furthering his professional career first and to the longest extent possible”, and “Singapore and her interests, including his son’s NS obligations, are secondary obligations, if at all” (Mahmud, 2018). As these roadblocks may complicate the pathway towards international sporting excellence, there is a need to balance the fostering of athletic talent, against the need for equity.

3. Declining Birth Rate

Another social roadblock is the declining birth rate in Singapore, remaining at its record low of 0.97 in 2024 despite it being the year of the Dragon, which historically has a higher number of births (Ng, 2025). Coupled with Singapore’s small population of 6.11 million in June 2025 (National Population and Talent Division, 2025), Singapore has a disadvantage against other countries due to her smaller talent pool. In a smaller population, there are many fields competing for talented youths, such as the Sciences or the Arts. In Singapore, where academic excellence is regarded as the most important thing to strive for, youths may be disinclined to pursue sports at an internationally competitive level. More thought should be put into how Singapore can strive against foreign athletes during international competitions despite these constraints. Where we allocate resources and how to strike a balance should be considered. Should Singapore take a more targeted approach, investing more into sports with the most potential to win Singapore medals, or continue in the direction of inclusivity, spreading out its resources so more athletes can benefit?

In summary, taking more steps towards international sporting success means balancing the academic-oriented culture present in Singaporean society with nurturing schooling athletes, considering fairness and equity, especially in the sphere of National Service, and fostering enough athletes from Singapore’s smaller population to compete internationally.

SOD 3: Economical Concerns

A key dimension of the debate is to consider whether Singapore should improve its standing at international sporting events despite the associated high economic costs. Increased investment in high-performance sport has both economic and opportunity costs.

It can be argued that sport contributes to tangible and intangible economic benefits. The global Sports industry is not merely a recreational or cultural activity, but a significant economic sector (GIS, 2024). Globally, sports generate over approximately $700 billion to 1% of global GDP annually (WSA, 2025) and supports tens of thousands of jobs across coaching, sport science, infrastructure, events, and

administration. Such returns demonstrate how targeted investment in elite sport can stimulate economic activity and generate multiplier effects beyond medals alone.

High-performance sport can also indirectly support economic growth through sports tourism, events, and global branding. Additionally, successful athletes and strong international performances raise a country's profile. In Singapore, government-backed initiatives such as the MSEF, with an investment of $165 million over four years, seek to attract world-class events that boost tourism, hospitality revenue, and international visibility (The Straits Times, 2024). Even outside of elite competition, Singapore's sports sector has contributed approximately S$1.7 billion to her GDP, illustrating how sport already plays a meaningful economic role (MCCY, 2020).

Additionally, with a boost in tourism through international sporting events, Singapore benefits from event-spending. Analysis from the events-management industry showed that Singapore's Sports Hub and other venues were driving surging demand for live entertainment and sports, supporting event-driven economic growth (HVS, 2025). Events such as the Singapore Grand Prix (F1) generated large incremental tourism revenue, and drew significant international crowds. With its great potential to bring in a lot of people, as well as exposing international audiences to Singapore's capability to host professional sporting events, the hosting of such sporting events will encourage more foreign investment. Through previous sporting successes, both private and public foreign investors are more eager to provide funding to support Singaporean teams (The Straits Times, 2024). These investments greatly benefit the players and Singapore as a whole, as it opens up another source of revenue for the sporting industry.

Besides that, new job opportunities through the hosting of such events, and the development of infrastructural and operational capacities is possible. Singapore builds an investment that ensures a legacy of high reputation to host future major sporting events as funds go into developing more of these infrastructure. These efforts to improve the quality of Singapore's sporting infrastructure will make Singapore a more attractive place to host major sporting events and international competitions. This will hopefully reposition Singapore as a hub for global sporting activity (SportSingapore, 2025).

To invest in high-performance sport, expenditure on sport science, specialised infrastructure, and talent identification and development are amongst the many things that Singapore would have to focus on. Especially since a viable sector that contributes significantly to Singapore's sporting success are investments in such research (ETA, 2022), alongside equipment and infrastructure. Funds would also go into ensuring local athletes are given the opportunity to raise their exposure at the international level (TeamGLEAS, 2024). Talent identification and development ensures quality coaching can be provided to more Singaporeans, thus utilising the nation's lower population to scout for more capable athletes and maximise the country's athlete manpower. Adding on, as higher quality coaching is given, a legacy of elite athletes can get carried forward under just one coach, a long-term impact multiplied across years. These are just a few of the main sectors that Singapore would have to invest in given it chooses to do so.

However, there are the high financial costs and opportunity costs associated with elite sport investment. High-performance systems require sustained funding for coaching, sport science, athlete support, overseas competition exposure, and specialised infrastructure (Rahmani et al., 2024). These costs are long-term and the outcomes are often uncertain, as international success is not guaranteed even with substantial

spending. For Singapore, increased funding for elite sport may come at the expense of other public priorities such as education, healthcare, housing, or broad-based community sport, where the economic and social returns may be more predictable. As a country with a smaller pool of athletes than most others, it would be harder to prioritise funding in sports when the nation has other more concerning priorities. This raises concerns about the over-reliance on public funding for elite sports and whether elite sport can become financially self-sustainable in the longer term.

Another economic dimension is inclusivity and equity. Investing heavily in elite sports could risk emphasizing only a handful of disciplines, creating "elite bubbles" separate from everyday Singaporeans. Creating more high-performance environments which require specialised infrastructure limits access to marginalised populations as these elite sports often have high barriers to entry (MCCY, 2015). Lower-income groups and people with disabilities will tend to be disproportionately affected. The trade-off that comes from investing large sums of money for this specialised infrastructure is the opportunity cost of spending money on broader community sports. The same funding used to focus on these high-performance athletes, their infrastructure, equipment, and training could have instead supported many community sports programmes and neighbourhood facilities. To mitigate this, there are policies that steer funds into mass sports and disability sports. The Disability Sports Master Plan reflects a focus on inclusivity and caring for all citizens (Inclusive Sport, n.d). Programmes like Active Health seek to empower Singaporeans to take ownership of health and live better through sport (Active Health, n.d). By promoting disability sports and community programmes, Singapore aims to ensure that rising talent at the top does not overshadow broad participation at the base.

Ultimately, we should consider whether the investment into improving Singapore's standing at international sports events will be a successful one in the longer term. Singapore implementing a high-performance sports strategy is overall dependent on whether she is able to deliver meaningful returns without diverting disproportionate resources from other national priorities.

SOD 4: The Importance of Sports as a Form of Diplomacy

International sport plays a crucial role for global recognition. It allows countries to showcase national values, governance capabilities, and credibility without asserting dominance (Chan, 2015). For a small city state like Singapore, international sporting performance and hosting of such events offers alternative pathways to enhance global visibility and diplomatic influence (Chun Wei, 2025)**.** Sporting success and well-executed events reinforce Singapore's image as an efficient, reliable, and globally connected country. These attributes complement our broader foreign policy objectives.

Hosting international sporting events creates informal diplomatic platforms that help facilitate engagement with foreign governments, international sport federations, multinational corporations, and the global media. Singapore's experience hosting events like the Formula 1 Singapore Grand Prix and even the World Aquatics Championships last year has strengthened our reputation as a trusted and capable global event host (Singapore Government, 2025; Sport Singapore, 2025). Diplomatically, such events enhance our credibility within international institutions and expand opportunities for relationship-building beyond formal diplomatic channels. These events do however require significant financial, security, and operational commitments. It is hence important to consider whether the continued expansion of hosting

such events aligns with Singapore's current priorities or whether other investments offer a larger long-term value.

At the regional level, sport plays a part towards ASEAN cooperation by fostering people-to-people ties and shared identity. Singapore's history of hosting the SEA Games and its commitment to hosting the Games again in 2029 reinforces our role as a regional partner and convenor (Sport Singapore, 2025). These efforts align with ASEAN principles of collaboration, mutual respect, and consensus-building. Nonetheless, an increased emphasis on international sporting prestige can end up raising concerns about competitiveness or even be seen as a way countries exert superiority within the region. Singapore hence needs to be able to carefully leverage sport to strengthen regional solidarity while maintaining ASEAN's principle of equality among member states.

Singapore's investment in inclusive sports and para-sports also carries diplomatic significance by aligning her national policy with the international norms on accessibility, equity, and disability inclusion. The hosting of international para-sports events and the adoption of universal design standards at venues such as the OCBC Aquatic Centre enhance Singapore's normative credibility and international standing globally (Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, 2025; Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, 2024).

International sporting success contributes to national identity and pride. This indirectly strengthens diplomatic cohesion and domestic legitimacy. Athletes representing Singapore on the global stage also help shape foreign perceptions of national discipline, resilience, and excellence (Singapore National Olympic Council, n.d.). High-profile achievements can amplify Singapore's visibility beyond what is expected of a small state.

A crucial consideration is the opportunity cost. Investments in elite sport and the hosting of international events compete with other means of diplomacy such as development assistance, climate diplomacy, and even multilateral engagement. There are also reputational risks involved. Unsuccessful events, underutilised infrastructure, or perceptions of excessive spending could undermine, rather than enhance, diplomatic credibility for Singapore.

Case Study of Australia

In Australia, the Australian Institute of Sports (AIS) has driven Australia to success on the international sporting stage. With its high-performance sport system and new National High Performance Strategy (NHPSS), the AIS is designed to foster elite talent through strategic frameworks and coordinated investments that strengthen Australia's competitive edge and sport excellence across global sport competitions.

NHPSS prioritised collaboration, resource sharing, and effort driven towards the high-performance sector. All stakeholders fall under a national framework ensuring they embrace national pride. (AIS, 2020).

NHPPS focuses on research and evidence-driven support systems, leveraging cutting-edge technology and analysis for their innovations. Government investment in infrastructure through funding enables high-quality training environments such as the announced record of $238 million in investment in high-performance sports, paving the way for athletes to thrive (ALM, 2024).

The unified model has brought Australia to consistent international success near the top, often outperforming other nations with larger populations in global competitions.

Comparatively in Singapore, the nation has stepped up its own high-performance sport ecosystem with the launch of the HPSI. The new body provides a more structured, end-to-end athlete development pathway from youth to elite levels by integrating the SSI and NYSI. Recent government statements (MCCY, 2026) showed that Singapore has seen improved performance regionally.

Australia's high-performance sport model demonstrates how a coordinated strategy and goal, consistent investment, and science-based systems translate into sustained international success. Singapore's recent initiatives indicate progress but there could be room for improvement. One way would be to have a deeper system integration and long-term strategic alignment, similar to Australia's model. While Singapore cannot replicate this model entirely due to its smaller population, narrower talent pool, and land limitations, it can adapt to fit the local context. Although both countries pursue international comparable objectives, Singapore's pathway to sporting success must prioritise inclusivity, efficiency, and sustainability over style.

Current Policies Supporting Singapore's International Sporting Performance

Singapore currently has multiple talent development pathways that nurture elite athletes while also balancing their academic commitments. For example, the Singapore Sports School (SSS) plays an important role by allowing student-athletes to train professionally while still continuing their formal education. This reduces the usual trade-offs between sports and academic commitments, which is crucial for student-athletes as when they inevitably retire from sports, they have a future outside of sports. The program that SSS offers is also complemented by the Sports Excellence (Spex) Framework (SportsSG, 2025), which provides athletes with support such as access to professional coaching, overseas training, sports science and medical services, as well as crucial career and education planning for the future. Under this Spex framework, the SpexScholarship also helps to further empower these elite athletes to train

professionally in order to represent Singapore at international competitions and improve Singapore's standing at international sporting events. However, athletes who develop later, or who specialise in non-traditional or less popular sports may receive weaker institutional support, which risks missing unconventional talent.

The Sports Excellence (Spex) Scholarship is a holistic support system that provides aid to a range of athletes across different sports and development stages. The programme has expanded significantly. Spex scholars make up a growing proportion of Singapore's medalists at major regional competitions. Monthly stipends and CPF top ups are provided for SpexScholars. To strengthen the talent pipeline, initiatives such as SpexPotential were introduced to support promising youth athletes earlier in their careers (MCCY, 2025). Aside from sporting performance, SpexEducation partners all six autonomous universities to offer dual-career and new-career study tracks. While the dual-career track is for athletes who want to balance studies with training and competition, the new career track is for athletes that want to begin studies after retiring from sport (MCCY, 2025). Complementary schemes such as SpexBusiness and enhanced SpexScholarship provisions work to improve athletes' financial security and post-career employability. These measures reflect a long-term policy commitment to developing elite sporting excellence while ensuring that athletes can pursue a good education, achieve career stability, and have a life beyond competitive sport (ibid).

In addition, Singapore also has funding and financial support structures in place which are used to allocate resources efficiently in this sporting sector. An example is the SpexCarding system, which categorises our athletes according to their performance and potential. This allows for differentiated access to funding, professional training, and international sporting event participation according to the athlete's potential. All these measures help to raise Singapore's standing at international sporting events. National Sports Associations (NSAs) such as the Football Association of Singapore (FAS) and Singapore Aquatics also receive annual government grants to further support coaching development, competition participation, and infrastructure maintenance (MCCY, 2025). These funding and financial support structures help to ensure the maximisation of limited national resources in order to achieve the best possible results. However, heavy investment into elite sport has opportunity costs as resources are diverted from other areas such as education or healthcare. Returns on investment in sports are also uncertain and difficult to quantify, resulting in potential waste of resources that could have been put to better use.

One example of this was the Kallang Alive Masterplan which was shared by Prime Minister Lawrence Wong in August 2024. It is a long-term redevelopment strategy aimed at transforming the Kallang area into Singapore's sports, entertainment and lifestyle district (Wong, 2024). The construction of a new indoor arena will replace the existing Singapore Indoor Stadium, which is over 35 years old and no longer meets modern day sporting and entertainment standards. The Singapore Sports Hub has been renamed to "The Kallang" (Jacob, 2025). This rebranding shows a broader vision to transform the former Sports Hub into a multi-use area that connects sport, entertainment, lifestyle and community experiences, instead of operating solely as a venue for isolated events.The Kallang group aims to deliver world-class experiences and strengthen the area's role as a hub for major sporting events and public engagement. As part of this transition, enhancements will be made to key amenities in the area, including upgrades to the Kallang Wave Mall with new playspaces, competition-ready padel courts and improved climbing facilities, with phased works beginning in mid-2026 and completion targeted by 2028. The Masterplan also mentions

Kallang as the new "Home of Team Singapore", bringing together high-performance sports infrastructure currently spread across Singapore. For example, the development of sports science and sports medicine facilities, and the relocation of the national training centres for several key sports. The Singapore Sports School will be relocated from Woodlands to Kallang, allowing student-athletes to train and study alongside senior national athletes, strengthening the athlete development pathway from youth to elite levels (Prime Minister's Office Singapore, 2024). These developments aim to increase accessibility to high quality equipment for existing athletes, as well as encourage community participation in sports, while also bolstering Singapore's ability to host regional and global sporting competitions.

Singapore further supplements domestic efforts through international partnerships and bringing in foreign expertise. Hiring foreign coaches and sport scientists is needed as Singapore does not have many experienced coaches nor experts in sports science to ensure our athletes reach their fullest potential. These international partnerships help to provide our athletes with overseas training camps and international sparring opportunities, which exposes and acclimatises them to global competitive standards. Such partnerships are incredibly important as they help to accelerate local athlete development, especially where local expertise remains limited. However, hiring foreign coaches and sport scientists is inadequate in the long run, since the knowledge transfer to local coaches is essential for the continuity of a robust domestic sports ecosystem.

Equity in sports is reflected in recent legislative changes. The 2025 amendment to the Singapore Sports Council Act (SportSG Act) adds the Singapore National Paralympic Council as a SportSG partner, emphasising inclusivity by elevating para sports as a foundational part of national sport governance. It also expands the definition of "sports" to include mind sports, like chess and bridge, and e-sports (MCCY, 2025), recognising a more diverse range of sporting disciplines. It also empowers SportSG to establish and maintain codes of practice for coaching and for sports and physical fitness equipment, facilities, and items. This is to increase professional standards and encourage the best practices across the sports and physical fitness sector. SportSG will also be given clearer authority to establish and oversee institutions that develop and train national athletes, including oversight of their sporting activities and academic curricula. This Bill shows long-term policy commitment towards evolving Singapore's sports performance.

Potential Solutions to Improve Singapore's Standing at International Sporting Events

One way that Singapore can strengthen its current policies is by encouraging greater sports participation in schools, and by identifying talent earlier. Talent scouting can be shifted to students in upper primary instead of waiting until secondary school. Using data from physical fitness tests such as the National Physical Fitness Award (NAPFA) which is conducted in Primary 4 and 6, inter-school competition results, as well as teacher observations can help to identify talent much earlier than usual. By identifying potential talent earlier, those flagged as potential athletes are allowed more time for their skill development, and this reduces the pressure of late specialisation into a chosen sport. At the same time, stronger academic–sports integration can be introduced through exam accommodations, flexible scheduling, and targeted academic tutoring for high-potential student-athletes. This reduces the risks of potential burnout

and addresses parental concerns that pursuing sports may compromise their child's academic outcomes (National Library of Medicine, 2025). This policy may be feasible as earlier identification gives the athletes a longer development pathway and more time to build technical skills, while building on existing infrastructure such as the NAPFA test, which reduces government expenditure on this policy.

Another area for improvement is the accessibility of Singapore's sports facilities. Priority access to public sports facilities could be granted to elite and high-potential athletes, which would help to increase training consistency without requiring costly new infrastructure to be built. Singapore could also further develop sport-specific high-performance zones equipped with specialised equipment to meet the demands of different disciplines. Additionally, establishing regional training centres across Singapore would reduce travel time for athletes, allowing for more frequent and focused training sessions (Ellis et.al, 2025). However, this policy may not be as feasible as outside of training hours, sport-specific facilities may be idle, resulting in an underutilisation of resources. Additionally, prioritising elite athletes in public training spaces may be seen as unfair, particularly in a space-constrained country like Singapore.

Lastly, Singapore can also strengthen current sporting policies by developing more local athlete coaches and enhancing their experience through knowledge transfers. When foreign coaches are hired to train our athletes, the authorities could impose a formal contract for the foreign coach to mentor a local assistant coach, ensuring a structured transfer of experience and knowledge to those local assistant coaches. This is critical as it reduces Singapore's long term reliance on foreign expertise while also building a more sustainable local coaching system. In addition, expanding the Coach Development Grant (CDG) (CoachSG,2025) would enable more local coaches to undergo overseas attachments in countries with strong sporting performance, such as the United States, Russia, or the United Kingdom such as to expand their experience and learn from experts in those countries and eventually bring back that newfound knowledge to Singapore. Furthermore, Singapore could also introduce performance-based incentives for coaches which could encourage higher coaching standards and higher athlete performance. This policy could be feasible as in the long term, it reduces dependence on foreign expertise, growing the local pool of coaches. Moreover, one experienced and skilled foreign coach could possibly mentor multiple local coaches over the course of his tenure in Singapore, passing on his experience and knowledge. However, the screening process for potential foreign coaches needs to be rigorous to ensure the quality of mentorship, and the government may need to spend resources in order to incentivise people to take up coaching as a profession, all of which are potential opportunity costs.

Questions A Cabinet Memorandum Must Answer (QACMMA)

1. Given our limited population, land, and funding, how realistic is it for Singapore to compete with much larger countries in the area of international sports?
2. How can Singapore encourage potential athletes to choose sports as a career, given the uncertainty of a professional sports career, and existing social pressures and attitudes?
3. What are the main obstacles stopping Singapore from developing a stronger presence at international sporting events?
4. Is Singapore performing well enough at international sporting events today?

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Topic 2: In view of the recent pandemic, how can Singapore improve its emergency-preparedness for future health crises?

Background of Topic

Singapore being a small city-state with no hinterland and having a high population density, health crises are not merely medical emergencies but are existential threats to national survival and social cohesion (PMO,2023). In Singapore, citizens have placed a high expectation on the state to provide safety and order. In return, the populace has historically acceded to strict compliance measures (Chan,2015). However, the recent COVID-19 pandemic tested this to its limits. It was revealed that while hospitals, stockpiles, and technology are critical to combat emergencies, social trust, psychological resilience, and community responsibility are equally vital for emergency preparedness (Gov.sg, 2023).

While the COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented test, Singapore's preparedness has historically extended beyond the mere physical stockpile of N95 masks. Since the 1984 launch of Total Defence, the state has invested in Social and Psychological pillars to ensure that the nation remains cohesive during crises (MINDEF, 2023). The pandemic affirmed that these social dimensions are not just 'bonus' traits but the primary engine of survival. Global research from The Lancet suggested that traditional healthcare capacity is secondary to community trust, which was the strongest predictor of infection control across 177 countries (Bollyky et al., 2022). Consequently, the government must now treat psychological resilience and community responsibility with the same strategic urgency as medical logistics, recognizing that social capital is an 'existential' resource (Gov.sg, 2023).

The central question for this cabinet is how Singapore can institutionalize the "kampung spirit" of mutual aid while fortifying its medical systems against the inevitable arrival of "Disease X" (Prime Minister's Office Singapore, 2023).

Historical Overview

From SARS Trauma to COVID Endurance, Singapore's approach to epidemic preparedness is defined by three major watersheds: the 2003 SARS outbreak, the 2009 H1N1 outbreak, and the 2020–2022 COVID-19 pandemic. The 2003 SARS crisis was a traumatic shock to the nation's psyche, infecting 238 people and claiming 33 lives. While the death toll was numerically low compared to global standards, the psychological scarring was profound. It exposed gaps in isolation protocols and hospital workflows, leading to the creation of the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) and the Disease Outbreak Response System Condition (DORSCON) framework (Phua, 2023). For nearly two decades, SARS served as the gold standard for simulation and planning.

However, COVID-19 presented a fundamentally different challenge. Unlike SARS, which was symptomatic and fast-moving, COVID-19 was stealthy and protracted. The Circuit Breaker of 2020 was the most significant restriction on civil liberties in independent Singapore's history (Tan, 2020). While the SARS-era playbook helped contain the initial wave, the sheer duration of the pandemic increased pandemic fatigue and strained social compliance. The crisis also highlighted a dangerous blind spot in Singapore's emergency preparedness: the migrant worker dormitories. The explosion of cases in these

clustered settings (accounting for the vast majority of Singapore's early infections) made Singaporeans more aware of this invisible section of society that is often ignored, proving that public health cannot be compartmentalized by citizenship status (Neo & Tan, 2021).

1. Key Statistics and The Cost of Resilience

The scale of the recent pandemic provides the baseline for future planning. COVID-19 resulted in over 1.7 million recorded infections in Singapore, touching nearly every household. Economically, the government drew down heavily on past reserves, committing over S$100 billion in fiscal support measures (such as the Jobs Support Scheme) to prevent mass unemployment and social instability (Ministry of Finance, 2023). This massive fiscal intervention was necessary not just for economics, but for social stability. It prevented the kind of wealth destruction that typically leads to civil unrest.

However, surveys conducted by the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) during the pandemic indicated a spike in anxiety and depression, particularly among young adults and the elderly living alone. The National Care Hotline received over 45,000 calls in its first year, signaling a "psychological pandemic" running parallel to the viral one (Ministry of Health, 2021). Furthermore, the healthcare workforce faced burnout as resignation rates among nurses rose from 8.9% in 2020 to 14.8% in 2021, a statistic that threatened the very backbone of Singapore's emergency response capability (Ministry of Health, 2022).

2. Why This Matters

This issue is urgent because the time between pandemics is the only time to build trust within the community. Singapore cannot wait for the next outbreak to start recruiting volunteers or building trust with vulnerable communities. The concepts of Total Defence specifically, Social and Psychological Defence is of relevance to this topic. The next crisis may not be a virus that kills, but a crisis of misinformation or a crisis of resource scarcity that pits one demographic against another.

Improving emergency preparedness is ultimately about strengthening the resilience of the people. It involves answering difficult questions: How do we protect the mental health of a generation that grew up in isolation? How do we ensure that essential workers are not neglected during a crisis? How do we ensure that when the next Circuit Breaker is activated, the social fabric holds firm? The legacy of the recent pandemic must be a more resilient, empathetic, and united Singapore, ready not just to survive the next storm, but willing to care for its weakest members while doing so (Gov.sg, 2023).

Root issues

1. Structural Vulnerabilities and Root Causes

Despite Singapore's high ranking in global preparedness indices, several structural issues still threaten its readiness for future crises.

a. The Silver Tsunami. Singapore is one of the fastest-aging societies in the world. By 2030, nearly one in four Singaporeans will be aged 65 or older. This demographic is doubly vulnerable as they

are medically more susceptible to severe diseases and socially more prone to isolation. Future pandemics will require a response system that is "geriatric-centric," focusing on community care networks to ensure the elderly are not left behind behind digital divides or lockdown walls (Begum & Chua, 2021).

b. Manpower Constraints. Singapore's healthcare system relies heavily on foreign healthcare workers. During a global crisis, borders close, and the supply of foreign nurses and doctors dries up. This structural reliance on global manpower supply chains is a critical vulnerability. Improving preparedness requires rethinking how Singapore values and retains its local healthcare core to ensure that surge capacity does not collapse when borders shut (Phua, 2023).

c. Density and Urban Living. With a population density of over 8,000 people per square kilometer, physical distancing is spatially challenging. The very design of Singapore—high-rise public housing, crowded public transport, and hawker centers—facilitates rapid viral transmission. This necessitates a social defense strategy where compliance with hygiene protocols is voluntary and high, as enforcement in every HDB corridor is impossible.

Singapore's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was supported by a well-developed Primary Health Care (PHC) system and strong acute-care infrastructure, which together enabled an effective public-health response. Singapore ranks highly in global health system efficiency. The Ministry of Health has invested in PHC steadily over the years (Phua, 2023). During the pandemic, 11 public hospitals were supported by 26 polyclinics and over 2,000 General Practitioner clinics under the Public Health Preparedness Clinic (PHPC) scheme. They provided affordable access to aid for moderate cases of COVID-19 (Communicable Diseases Agency, 2025). This helped manage the challenges posed by the pandemic (Phua, 2023). Singapore's network of Public Health Preparedness Clinics and polyclinics served as first points of contact for monitoring, early detection, and community-level care, supplementing hospital capacity, and helping to contain the spread. Core facilities such as the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) and vaccine logistics were also in place (Prime Minister's Office, 2025), which allowed Singapore to "maintain the resilience of our healthcare system" and vaccinate the population (Prime Minister's Office, 2023). These measures and infrastructure all helped Singapore to respond quickly and maintain the continuity of essential services throughout the pandemic. (Phua, 2023).

The pandemic also exposed vulnerabilities within Singapore's health system, especially in terms of manpower. Public healthcare institutions had many patients to take care of. A lot of pressure was placed on hospitals and polyclinics during surge demand periods (Phua, 2023). Healthcare workers experienced higher patient loads. For example, nursing staff went from managing 6 to 12 COVID-19 patients per shift, leading to exhaustion, increased overtime, and burnout, with many being unable to take breaks or leaves for extended periods. Quarantine requirements for exposed staff exacerbated manpower shortages. About 400 healthcare workers tested positive for Covid-19. As a result, many medical staff were put on extended duty without relief, which affected COVID-19 and routine care services. Hospitals postponed non-urgent procedures to prioritise critical care, while emergency department waiting times rose significantly due to staff constraints. Additional manpower from the Singapore Healthcare Corps and mental health initiatives were brought in for support. This prolonged pressure on our healthcare systems demonstrated the need for better workforce planning and support systems in future health crises (Begum & Chua, 2021).

During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, Singapore experienced widespread panic buying, fuelled not only by fears of supply shortages but also by psychological and social factors. A study by NTU stated that consumers were driven by the fear of the unknown, perceived shortages, and peer pressure that was triggered by seeing others stockpile essentials such as rice, toilet paper, and canned food (Lim, 2021). People tended to overestimate the likelihood of shortages and were influenced by people around them. When some households began hoarding items, many blindly followed. The research by NTU showed that panic buying was mainly caused by a cycle of fear and social influence, exacerbated by uncertainty and anxiety around the pandemic's trajectory. Assistant Professor Yuen Kum Fai, from NTU's CEE, who led the study, said: "At the height of the pandemic, we saw suppliers overwhelmed by demand, raw material shortages drove prices up, and there was a market failure where high demand met limited supply. We have seen measures to address the detrimental impact of panic buying, such as stores rationing essential items and modifying their opening hours. But our study tackles the root problem of the situation – the psychological and social components of panic buying. The results are not only useful for the big players in supply chains, but also policymakers and the public." CEE's Associate Professor Wong Yiik Diew, Associate Chair (Academic), who co-led the study, said: "Understanding attitudes in relation to panic buying during a pandemic is important to ensuring food security, especially in Singapore. Being a small city-state with limited resources, food security is a challenge on several fronts, as over 90% of food in Singapore is imported. Knowing the reasons behind panic buying would allow policymakers and the public to address the problem. Global supply chains can be fragile, and a disruption caused by panic buying could have a domino effect, impacting the lives of many people." (NTU, 2021).

COVID-19 also highlighted the inequalities in living and working conditions. Migrant workers make up only a small part of the population, but still accounted for almost 90% of confirmed cases during the initial outbreak. This led to large clusters that required complete dormitory lockdowns for nearly two months. A maximum of 20 workers shared a room with communal facilities where conditions were crowded and unsanitary. This sped up the pace of transmission. Pre-existing standards proved to be inadequate for pandemic conditions. This sparked a debate for the need to improve dormitory living conditions and to update the laws governing these facilities. The government's initial reluctance to mandate housing upgrades was due to cost concerns and confidence in the existing Foreign Employee Dormitory Act (FEDA). After the pandemic revealed gaps in regulation, plans to expand FEDA coverage to all dormitory types and reconsider housing standards were made in order to enhance resilience against future health threats. Separately, this situation also raised concerns about the legality of confining migrant workers to their dormitories and limiting their mobility (Song, n.d).

During the pandemic, Singapore schools shifted rapidly to home-based learning (HBL) when required, using a mix of online platforms and hardcopy workbooks. The e-learning portal, Singapore Student Learning Space (SLS), became the main platform for HBL assignments (Ang, 2020). To close the digital divide, about 12,500 laptops/tablets and 1,200 Wi-Fi dongles were loaned to needy students during the first lockdown (Lee & Yeo, 2020).

Despite the loaning of digital devices, inequalities were still apparent. Differences in home support, such as some households having multiple devices, spacious study areas, and parental support while others struggled with limited equipment, poor internet access, and crowded living spaces, made learning difficult, and unequal (Lee & Yeo, 2020). Parents sometimes lacked time or skills to help, trying to juggle

work with helping their children (Ang, 2020). In the long term, this could widen educational and income gaps in the same age cohort (Lee & Yeo, 2020). Many children felt isolated during HBL. Mental-health professionals reported increases in anxiety and depression among youths, attributing it to social isolation and HBL struggles (Yeo, 2020). Parents and teachers had to also focus on students' well-being and slow down academic expectations to help them cope (Lim, 2021).

Singapore's digital contact-tracing programme, TraceTogether, widely used to accelerate contact tracing, also became part of a data privacy controversy that exposed tensions between public health measures and civil trust. Originally, authorities had assured the public that data collected through TraceTogether would be used "purely for contact tracing" to fight COVID-19. However, in January 2021 it was revealed in Parliament that the police could, under the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC), access TraceTogether data for criminal investigations if required, since the CPC empowers police to request any data necessary for investigations (Baharudin, 2021). This contradicted earlier public statements and sparked concerns among some academics and civil society figures. Some said that the government had backtracked on privacy assurances, potentially undermining trust in public-health initiatives which depend on this widespread adoption of digital tools (Baharudin, 2021). Legal and political responses followed and subsequently, in an effort to balance privacy with public security needs, the Parliament passed a Bill that limited the use of TraceTogether and SafeEntry data to only serious crimes such as murder and terrorism, and mandated the deletion of personal contact-tracing data when the pandemic ended (Chee, 2021).

2. Past Policy Initiatives and Key Legislation

Singapore's pandemic preparedness used past policies, such as The Infectious Diseases Act (IDA) of 1976, as an existing framework (Communicable Diseases Agency, 2025). The IDA allows the Director-General of Health to mandate case notification, isolate and treat infected people, and conduct contact tracing and quarantine (Communicable Diseases Agency, 2025). Until recently, the IDA only accounted for two binary states, normal or Public Health Emergency (PHE), but lessons from the pandemic led to an amendment in 2024 (Abdullah, 2024). The amended Act consisted of an intermediate "Public Health Threat" (PHT) category in addition to a PHE (Abdullah, 2024). The Health Minister can impose graduated measures when outbreaks are serious, but not extreme (Abdullah, 2024). At the same time, Singapore's DORSCON (Disease Outbreak Response System Condition) framework is a colour-coded threat-level system established after SARS that guided public measures. DORSCON links alert levels, green, yellow, orange, red, to response actions. For example, in early 2020, MOH raised DORSCON from Green to Orange, which enhanced surveillance and precautionary measures (Thangayah, Tan, Lim, & Fua, 2020). Measures such as wearing masks and safe distancing rules were also enforced.

Singapore's healthcare system used surge capacity planning to manage large numbers of patients without overwhelming standard hospitals. Singapore General Hospital (SGH), the nation's largest tertiary centre, prepared for increased patient demand by transforming a multi-story carpark into a dedicated Flu Screening Area (FSA). This plan was part of a larger strategy to expand capacity rapidly and safely. The conversion project was initiated as early as 2013 and simulations were carried out to ensure workflows, infection-control protocols and infrastructure met clinical standards. When Singapore raised its DORSCON alert from Green to Orange on 7 February 2020, the FSA was ready to divert clinically stable

or screening patients away from the main emergency department, reducing cross-infection risks, and preserving hospital resources (Thangayah, Tan, Lim, & Fua, 2020).

Singapore also leveraged its community networks. The People's Association (PA) grassroots system was an emergency support network. PA volunteers and staff distributed surgical masks and TraceTogether tokens, delivered care packs and groceries to isolated households, and helped run community vaccination centres (Kurohi, 2021) during the circuit breaker. In Parliament, the Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Culture, Community and Youth noted that the PA's longstanding work in building social capital and trust enabled Singapore to respond more cohesively and rapidly to the crisis, illustrating how peacetime community engagement contributed to emergency resilience (Kurohi, 2021).

Economically, the government introduced targeted relief. The Jobs Support Scheme (JSS) is a wage-subsidy programme that funds a portion of businesses' salaries. The JSS saved about 165,000 jobs in 2020 (Ministry of Finance, 2021). The JSS also helped protect wages: for every 10 percentage-point increase in the subsidy, average local wages were 1.7% to 5.3% higher, amounting to about $70–$150 more per month for local workers still employed. Without the JSS, employment and income outcomes for Singaporeans would have been worse amid the pandemic's economic shock, underscoring the JSS' critical role in stabilising the labour market during the crisis.

In response to the limitations observed in the first round of pandemic-driven HBL, the Ministry of Education (MOE) implemented measures to make sure students were prepared for future school closures. MOE formalised plans for blended learning as part of regular schooling, setting aside around 10% of curriculum time for HBL in secondary schools and 10–20% in junior colleges and Millennia Institute to develop digital learning routines. MOE accelerated the rollout of personal learning devices. All secondary students received their laptops or tablets by 2021. Pilot schemes were also introduced for upper primary students to begin using digital devices. MOE also expanded professional development for teachers to better equip them with online and blended teaching skills. These measures were implemented to ensure that if there is a need for a protracted period of HBL in the future, both students and educators would be better prepared and supported (Tan, 2021).

3. Projection Into the Future

The Communicable Diseases Agency (CDA) is a statutory board under the Ministry of Health, launched in November 2025 as part of Singapore's long-term post-COVID reforms. Its purpose is to strengthen preparedness, prevention, and response to future pandemics and endemic infectious diseases. The CDA brings together functions previously spread across multiple agencies, including disease surveillance, outbreak response planning, infection prevention, and public health research. Unlike other ad hoc pandemic task forces, the CDA is designed to operate continuously. It refines preparedness plans, conducts scenario exercises, maintains stockpiles, and coordinates international cooperation. The CDA also plays a role in public risk communication and trust-building, recognising that effective crisis response depends on sustained public cooperation and confidence (Prime Minister's Office Singapore, 2025).

The pandemic revealed how particular groups are more vulnerable, highlighting a possible policy gap. Housing standards for foreign workers are being revised. In 2023, a transition plan was announced to

retrofit existing dormitories to much higher living standards (Kok, 2023). A new government entity, NESST Singapore, is building two purpose-built dormitories set to open by 2025 and 2028, and from April 2023, the Foreign Employee Dormitories Act will cover 1,500 smaller dormitories, more than the previous 53. These reforms aimed to cap the number of occupants per room, mandate facilities, and improve ventilation (Kok, 2023). Healthcare services for migrant workers have also been strengthened, with the government setting up 10 dedicated medical centres that are partnered with private clinics, and mandating employer-provided health insurance for dormitories and construction-sector workers (Kok, 2023). The Assurance, Care and Engagement (ACE) unit, created during COVID to monitor dormitories, will become permanent, so that response can be quicker in the event of future outbreaks (Kok, 2023). However, some communal areas and toilets remain dirty, especially over weekends, and overcrowding persists in large sites like Sungei Tengah Lodge where residents share communal facilities. Complaints were also made about inconsistent Wi-Fi connectivity and the poor quality of catered food. These mixed outcomes highlight that while post-pandemic reforms have improved living standards, ongoing investment is still needed to improve workers' welfare and future public health resilience (Ng, 2023).

Singapore is also reinforcing its supply chain resilience, to ensure that Singapore can secure critical supplies. This is done by diversifying import sources, reviewing stockpiling strategies, expanding potential sources, and making sure that essential supplies are available. (Gov.sg, 2023).

Complementing these logistical measures, the government also plans to deepen whole-of-society partnerships. The white paper on Singapore's response to Covid-19 recommends "proactively partnering with the private sector" to identify resilience gaps (Zalizan, 2023). Regarding the manpower needed in the healthcare sector, the SG Healthcare Corps will be further trained as a reserve force in future pandemics (ibid). Data-sharing protocols between public and private healthcare will be strengthened to allow seamless coordination in a crisis. This white paper stresses whole-of-society resilience and building trust so that plans can be translated into quick action for the next pandemic (White Paper Singapore's Response to COVID-19, n.d.).

Scopes of Debate (SODs)

SOD 1: National Identity and its salience in emergency preparedness

One central scope of debate is how preparation for future health crises affects Singapore's national identity. Health crises test community resilience, collective national values like public solidarity and trust in government institutions, which can impact national identity (Asthana, 2024). For example, the public response to COVID-19 in Singapore bolstered the perception of a disciplined and respectful society, where citizens were largely willing to adhere to public health measures for the collective good. This reinforced a sense of national identity based on social responsibility and mutual sacrifice, especially in times of heightened uncertainty.

National identity can also be shaped by long term institutional and infrastructural investments necessary for a national emergency preparedness. Existing infrastructure like the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) as well as medical supplies stockpiling showcase Singapore's pragmatic approach to crises that values efficiency, safety, and resilience (Lee, 2020). This investment over time creates a

national narrative of preparedness and competence that reinforces public belief in governance and enhances the national sense of identity and belief in being prepared and responsible as a community for future health crises.

At the same time, the pandemic revealed tensions within Singaporean national fabric, particularly with regards to inclusivity and equality. For example, the outbreaks in the migrant worker dormitories challenged the national perception of a uniformly resilient society, exposing gaps between our national ideals and reality (Tan, 2020). How Singapore addresses this issue of disparity in its future emergency preparedness will determine if the country's national identity is seen as inclusive or conditional. An emergency preparedness plan that protects all segments of society, including non-citizens and vulnerable communities, can help to strengthen a greater sense of shared belonging and social cohesion.

There is also debate over how much public compliance should be framed as a matter of civic obligation (Kuzushima, 2024). In many ways, strong enforcement and surveillance might provide better crisis responses, but over-reliance on control mechanisms places nations in a position of fostering an identity less grounded in collective trust and more on coercion. Hence, long term preparedness needs to be carefully calibrated so that obedience is not confused with unity. This is because national identity should come from voluntary cooperation and not fear of punishment.

In conclusion, as a nation, emergency preparedness plays a significant role in shaping Singapore's national identity. Successful responses can reinforce national values and cohesion, while failures or perceived injustices can undermine social cohesion and national identity. Therefore, future preparedness plans should reflect not just technical preparedness, but also the ways in which policies reflect and reinforce national unity and identity.

SOD 2: Social dimensions of future pandemic preparedness

Firstly, one area of debate is regulating public behaviour, while preserving citizens' trust. Research by NTU on panic buying shows that it was primarily driven by fear, perceived scarcity, and social pressure. People noticed others stockpiling essentials (NTU, 2021), and did the same. For the government, transparent communication alone may be insufficient. Authorities must actively counter misinformation, manage social reactions, and reassure the public early to prevent these self-reinforcing cycles of irresponsible behaviour.

Secondly, regarding public trust and digital surveillance, Singapore's TraceTogether system significantly reduced contact-tracing time. However, public confidence took a hit when it was revealed that TraceTogether data could be accessed by the police under the Criminal Procedure Code, contradicting earlier statements that the data would be used only for contact tracing (Baharudin, 2021). Legislation was later passed to restrict this access to serious crime, but risking public trust could discourage voluntary participation in public health tools. Such public health tools are only effective when people use them (Baharudin, 2021). The balance between implementing tools and preserving the public's trust should be examined to ensure that these tools work well.

Thirdly, the COVID-19 outbreaks in migrant worker dormitories showed that adhering to health precautions is a luxury not everyone can afford. Crowded environments and limited space for movement

made maintaining distancing and hygiene measures difficult. Community behaviour is impacted by structural conditions (Song, n.d.). Emergency preparedness should consider stronger social protection and targeted strategies for vulnerable groups, to ensure that public health measures are both fair and effective for everyone.

Lastly, social cohesion is another factor in community readiness. The government cannot manage future pandemics alone. Public cooperation is needed for collective resilience (Prime Minister's Office Singapore, 2025). Even the best preparedness plans may fail without community buy-in, so future crisis planning should discuss how to integrate community engagement as a key part of emergency response.

The social aspect of the debate surrounding future health crises focuses on how Singapore can encourage responsible community behaviour while preserving trust, equity, and social cohesion. Policymakers must consider how communication strategies, data governance, and varying social systems interact to shape public response.

SOD 3: Economical Perspectives

From an economic perspective, improving Singapore's emergency preparedness for future health crises requires a shift from reactive economic relief to proactive economic resilience. While public health measures remain central during pandemics, the ability of the economy to absorb shocks, maintain essential functions, and recover quickly is equally critical (MOF, 2020). The previous Covid-19 pandemic had demonstrated how major economic shock comes with wide-ranging consequences. Lockdowns, closure of borders, and social distancing disrupted economic activity on an unprecedented scale (MTI, 2020). For a highly globalised and trade-dependent economy like Singapore, it is imperative that economic preparedness should be treated as an integral component of national emergency planning rather than a secondary response.

One scope of debate is the need for pre-emptive economic buffers and support mechanisms that can be activated immediately during a health crisis. Singapore could design standing funds and contingency plans targeted at sustaining essential industries and preserving jobs instead of relying solely on large stimulus packages after outbreaks occur. These buffers could minimise economic shock, reduce market uncertainty, and expedite recovery (Wong, 2023).

As previously mentioned, Singapore's economy is deeply integrated into global trade networks, making it vulnerable to international disruptions in goods and labour during pandemics. Thus, another key scope of debate is business continuity and supply chain resilience. Parliamentary and economic reviews stress the importance of supply chain diversification and maintaining stockpiles of essential items so that trade and industrial activities can continue even under restricted situations during health crises (SG101, 2025).

Furthermore, workforce adaptability and human capital investment is equally central to economic preparedness. Long-term investments in skills development, reskilling programmes, and adaptable job structures ensure that Singapore's labour force remains employable and productive under crises. The government's economic strategies emphasise upskilling and reskilling as part of national resilience which

signals the importance of a flexible workforce in sustaining economic momentum during future health emergencies (MOF, 2020).

Economic preparedness should also incorporate social resilience measures to ensure that vulnerable workers and sectors are protected during disruptions. Pandemic planning that integrates social safety nets such as targeted wage support, income relief schemes, and workforce retraining, can prevent inequality from widening and maintain domestic demands during downturns. Singapore's ongoing economic reviews and support frameworks such as the Economic Strategy Review (ESR) under Singapore Economic Resilience Taskforce (SERT) (GovSG, 2025) reflect an understanding that inclusive preparedness contributes to both social stability and economic resilience.

Hence, how Singapore can improve its emergency preparedness lies in choosing (a) proactive investment, (b) structural resilience, (c) strengthening supply chains, (d) increasing workforce adaptability, and (e) incorporating buffers well before crises occur. By doing so, Singapore can better protect its economy and ensure a rapid recovery when future health crises arise.

SOD 4: The Importance of Diplomacy to improve preparedness for future health crisis

Pandemics are no longer viewed as domestic public health challenges as it once was. Now it is viewed as a transnational security threat with direct diplomatic implications. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how disruptive infectious diseases can be by affecting international trade, travel, supply chains, and geopolitical stability. Singapore, being a highly globalised city-state highly dependent on the cross-border flows of people, goods, and capital, emergency preparedness is a fundamental pillar in establishing foreign policy, economic diplomacy, and national security (Gov.sg, 2023).

Diplomatically, Singapore's preparedness impacts its internal resilience. It also can affect our credibility as a reliable international partner. Weak preparedness risks undermining investor confidence and regional trust. Singapore's standing in multilateral institutions would also ultimately fall. On the other hand, strong preparedness enhances Singapore's reputation as a stable hub in times of global crisis.

Effective pandemic preparedness depends largely on international cooperation, early information-sharing, and coordinated responses. As a result, Singapore participates actively in multilateral health frameworks involving entities such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and ASEAN. Singapore also recognises that early detection and transparency are critical to limiting cross-border transmission (World Health Organization, 2022; ASEAN Secretariat, 2021).

However, COVID-19 had exposed limitations in global health governance. Delayed reporting, uneven compliance with international health regulations, and vaccine nationalism are some of these limitations. Singapore needs to balance the extent to which it should deepen diplomatic engagement in regional surveillance networks, data-sharing arrangements, and mutual assistance agreements. Singapore must also balance concerns over sovereignty, data security, and unequal availability of resources, infrastructure, and technical expertise among partner states.

The pandemic underscored deep inequalities in global access to vaccines, therapeutics, and medical supplies (Bollyky et al.,2022). Singapore had managed to secure early vaccine access through advance purchase agreements and diversified supply sources but many developing countries faced prolonged shortages by not being able to do so (OECD, 2021).This raises important diplomatic considerations on whether future preparedness strategies should include stronger commitments to global health equity such as supporting regional manufacturing, stockpile sharing, or technical assistance, both as a moral responsibility and as a pragmatic measure to reduce regional outbreak risks.

As a global aviation and maritime hub, Singapore faces heightened exposure to imported infectious diseases. Border health measures, such as travel restrictions, health screening, and vaccination requirements, are diplomatically sensitive. This is because they can directly affect bilateral relations, tourism flows, and international businesses' confidence (Ministry of Transport Singapore, 2022). During COVID-19, Singapore implemented calibrated border controls that evolved with changing global conditions, all the while balancing public health protection against economic openness (Woo,2020). Future preparedness raises difficult diplomatic trade-offs. An overly restrictive border policy may strain relations with neighbouring states and undermine Singapore's role as a connector economy, while delayed controls may increase domestic health risks. It is thus important to find a balance between these two issues.

Singapore also needs to be able to balance national preparedness with responsible international engagement without compromising public confidence at home. Public trust and transparent governance are increasingly being recognised as important assets during health crises. Singapore's data-driven approach, regular public communication, and legal frameworks contributed to relatively high domestic compliance during COVID-19 (Lee, 2023). Internationally, this reinforced perceptions of Singapore as a well-governed and predictable state. However, controversies surrounding digital contact tracing and data use highlighted tensions over privacy norms, and undermined public trust. Diplomatically, such issues affect Singapore's ability to promote digital health solutions and data-sharing arrangements internationally too.

Despite strong institutions, Singapore faces structural constraints that shape its diplomatic options. Limited land, reliance on imports, and an ageing population restrict the extent to which Singapore can achieve self-sufficiency during prolonged crises. Investments in stockpiles, surge capacity, and international partnerships carry significant fiscal and opportunity costs (Phua, 2023).

Diplomatically, the key issue is prioritisation. Resources allocated to pandemic preparedness may ultimately limit investments in other areas of foreign policy, such as climate diplomacy, development assistance, or even defence cooperation. We must decide what we are willing to sacrifice for pandemic preparedness as all of these areas play a vital role for Singapore.

Case study of South Korea

During the Covid-19 pandemic, South Korea had adopted a 3-T strategy which consisted of Testing, Tracing, and Treatment. Their prepared response with a comprehensive strategy was the result of lessons learnt from previous outbreaks, such as the 2015 Middle East Respiratory System (MERS) outbreak. This

incident had resulted in a number of deaths due to the country's inability to efficiently fight against MERS and identify the virus before it had already infected many others. This taught the nation the importance of early detection, improved data analysis, and accurate diagnoses so as not to waste precious time (Kim, 2020).

The 3-T strategy, which can be referred to as a "contact-based biosurveillance system", allowed the country to detect the coronavirus early, prevent further spreading, and prevent the healthcare system from being overwhelmed. A key feature of South Korea's approach was the country's ability to significantly scale up testing capacity within a short time frame. Through public-private partnerships and constant fast-tracking of test kits early in the pandemic, the government was able to develop widespread testing infrastructure such as drive-through or walk-through screening centres (KDI, 2021). These efforts ensured individuals could be tested and the infected could be identified efficiently.

South Korea's Treatment strategy involved classification, which ensured that critical resources were given to patients with the highest priority with the goal of keeping a low fatality rate in the early pandemic and preventing the healthcare system from being overwhelmed. Managing resources meant prioritising severe-risk patients to be hospitalised while patients with significantly less severe symptoms were cared for in residential treatment centres (Tejerina et al., 2025).

Additionally, after the MERS outbreak, the government understood the importance of transparency. South Korea hence emphasised coordination across government agencies and clear communication with the public. Doing so resulted in citizens abiding by safety protocols and this helped to minimise infections as citizens practised safety measures such as social distancing diligently (High, 2021). By prioritizing transparency, openness, and having government accountability, South Korea was able to foster public trust and compliance, which were necessary for a successful crisis response (WHO, 2020).

Singapore shares similar characteristics with South Korea such as having advanced healthcare systems, strong governance, and a high urban density. South Korea's strategy and experience demonstrated how effective legal and transparent frameworks, partnerships with private sectors, and investing in scalable healthcare systems and technological integration could enhance emergency preparedness. Stronger cooperation, better digital integration, and transparency, all of which builds trust in the public, can help Singapore respond more rapidly and effectively to future health crises.

Current Policies Supporting Emergency Preparedness for Future Health Crises

In view of the lessons learnt across past pandemics, the government has institutionalized the valuable lessons learnt for future health crises. The establishment of the Communicable Diseases Agency (CDA) in 2025 marks a pivotal strategy shift. Designed to centralize outbreak response, the CDA aims to fix the coordination friction seen during COVID-19, where policies sometimes were perceived to be reactive when there were viral outbreaks. The CDA's introduction of a "disease-agnostic" framework means Singapore is preparing for threats that do not yet exist like the so-called "Disease X." This modular

approach allows for the rapid scaling of quarantine facilities and contact tracing without needing to reinvent the wheel each time (Prime Minister's Office Singapore, 2025).

The existing healthcare infrastructure system built up in Singapore after the SARS crisis in 2001, which was subsequently upgraded during the COVID-19 outbreak, has a large surge capacity in preparedness for any future health crises. The National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) was also established in 2019, and it plays a crucial role in Singapore's response in terms of outbreak management, including the use of isolation wards, negative pressure rooms that stop contaminated air from escaping, and its laboratories to detect and treat diseases in a timely manner (NCID, 2025). Currently, some public hospitals for example, Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) and Changi General Hospital (CGH) already have some wards that can be converted to isolation wards during an outbreak. These precautionary strategies are more effective because of the country's readily available stockpile of key medicines, personal protective equipment (PPE) and other medical supplies.

The Singapore government also boasts efficient surveillance, detection, and early response systems. The DORSCON model offers a simple and clear colour-coded national warning system and guides public behaviour during major outbreaks (Singapore Wall Street, 2025). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the application of technology such as the TraceTogether and SafeEntry systems aided the government greatly in mass tracing. Though these two tracing systems are now deactivated, these systems are in place and can be easily re-activated if needed to enable the swift launch of the measures by the government in the event of a future health crisis. In terms of the government and politics, the government adopts a Whole of Nation approach in dealing with health crises. An important aspect in the government's coordination effort is the creation of the Multi-Ministry Taskforce (MTF). The MTF is led by the Ministry of Health (MOH), which oversees health, borders, education, employment, and economic domains. Under the Infectious Diseases Act, the government can enforce quarantine, isolation, and movement restrictions when necessary (Communicable Diseases Agency, 2025). Communication to the public from the various ministries takes place through Gov.sg and Whatsapp alerts which provide updates and guidance during an outbreak. Additionally, POFMA has been used to address misinformation during health crises, helping to limit the spread of falsehoods that could undermine public trust and compliance (Goh, 2024).

However, these policies represent more than just bureaucratic reorganization; they are tests of public communication. One of the key issues during the COVID-19 pandemic was message fatigue and confusion arising from rapidly changing protocols (Jalelah, 2021). Hence, the CDA's mandate includes improving crisis communication to maintain public trust. If the public loses faith in the clarity and competence of the central authority, compliance will drop, potentially causing this "social defense" to collapse.

Strengthening Existing Policies

To further improve emergency preparedness for future health crises, Singapore can strengthen public health capacity by building on existing systems. National stockpiles already in place should be maintained and expanded, with a greater range of diagnostics, antiviral medications, and critical medical equipment so as to avoid the dangers of global supply-chain shortages. Singapore can also use prefabricated healthcare facilities which are easily and quickly deployed in the event of large-scale health crises, thus

reducing reliance on the ad-hoc conversion of public spaces (Communicable Diseases Agency, 2025). Regular stress-testing of hospital surge plans and healthcare manpower reserves will also help.

Moreover, Singapore can also enhance preparedness by strengthening community resilience and risk communication (World Health Organisation, 2025). Although effective communication channels already exist, future strategies could encourage more people-oriented preparedness, including public education about responses to outbreaks. Expanding awareness initiatives could take the form of introducing health literacy programmes in schools, workplaces, and community groups. These programmes can help to reduce panic and resistance to public health measures when there is an outbreak. Providing more concise messages, which makes it easier for Singaporeans to understand why certain restrictions are applied during outbreaks can also promote unity and trust in the government, reducing the need for enforcing any measures implemented.

Finally, the existing systems should also be reinforced through technological solutions and international cooperation. Digital platforms such as TraceTogether could be upgraded to have a "standby" mode that have better privacy protection and can gather data more quickly for the government to make decisions faster. In addition, working more closely with international and regional partners like ASEAN health networks and the World Health Organisation (WHO) will also provide access to crucial outbreak data, better medical practices, and medical resources ahead of outbreak occurrence. This international cooperation aligns with Singapore's preparedness as pandemics represent transnational issues and requires the cooperation of governments and transnational organisations.

Questions A Cabinet Memorandum Must Answer (QACMMA)

1. What can be done to encourage responsible community behaviour during pandemics?
2. How can Singapore strengthen mental, social, and community support during long lasting crises?
3. What improvements are needed for Singapore to respond faster and more effectively during a health crisis?
4. How can Singapore build stronger international ties to aid with future pandemic preparedness?

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