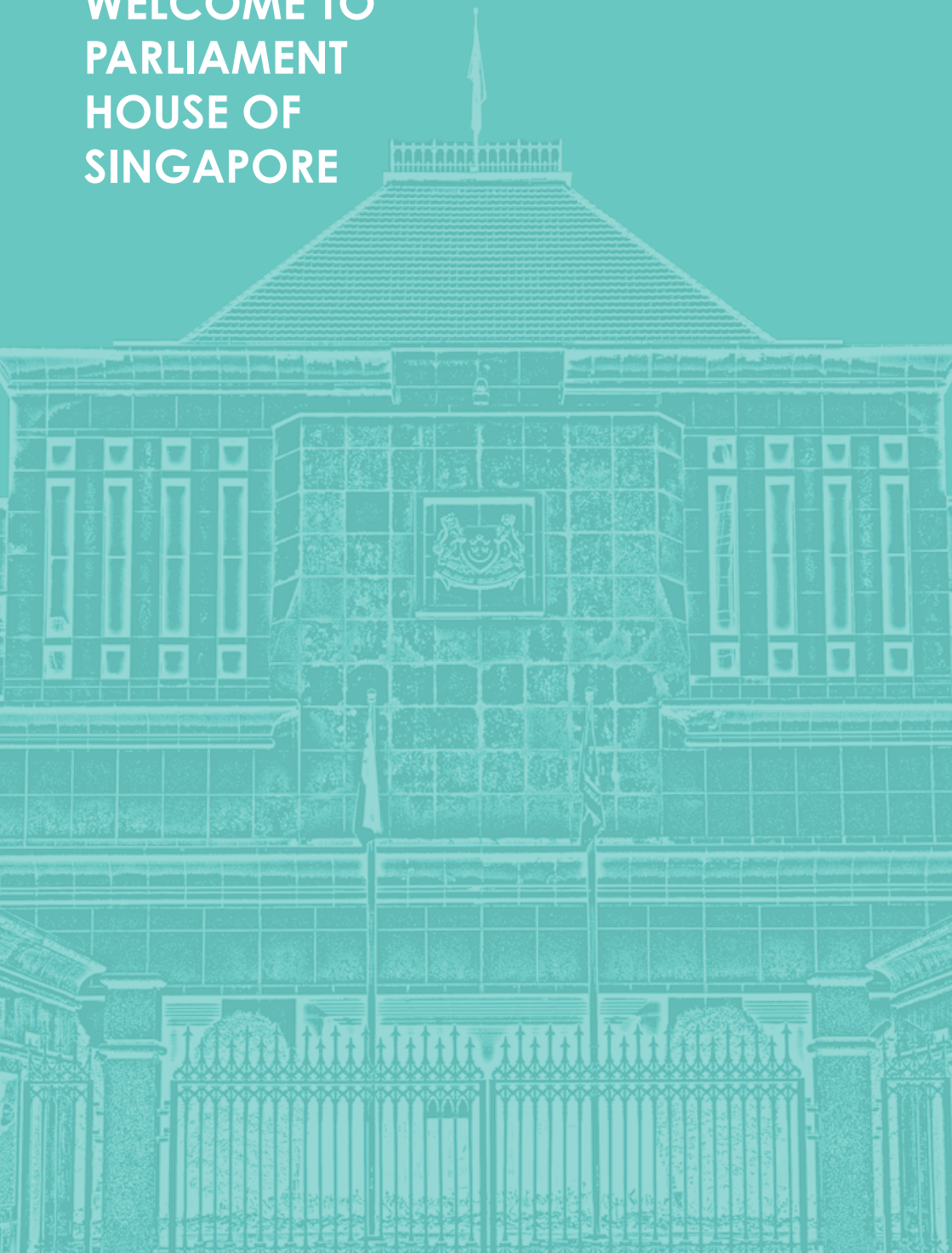


**A GUIDE TO  
PARLIAMENT  
OF SINGAPORE**

# WELCOME TO PARLIAMENT HOUSE OF SINGAPORE



# What is a sitting?

A sitting refers to the meeting of the House.

- It usually takes place on a weekday that is not a public holiday.
- However, Parliament may by resolution agree for it to take place during the weekend or on a public holiday.
- Parliament sits for an average of 30 to 40 days yearly.
- The date of an upcoming Parliament sitting is usually announced a week in advance on various platforms such as the Parliament website, social media and others.
- It usually commences at 1.30 pm and ends when all items of business have been discussed or when Parliament decides to adjourn.



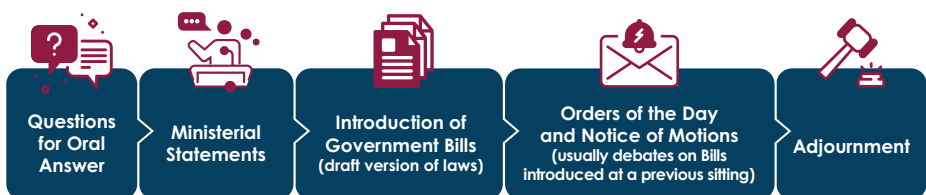
## How a sitting begins:

- An electronic bell is sounded for 3 minutes to call MPs to the Chamber.
- The Speaker's procession, which comprises the Serjeant-at-Arms, Speaker, Clerk of Parliament and an Assistant Clerk, enters the Chamber at 1.30 pm with the Serjeant-at-Arms carrying the Mace on his right shoulder.
- The sitting begins after the Speaker has taken his chair.

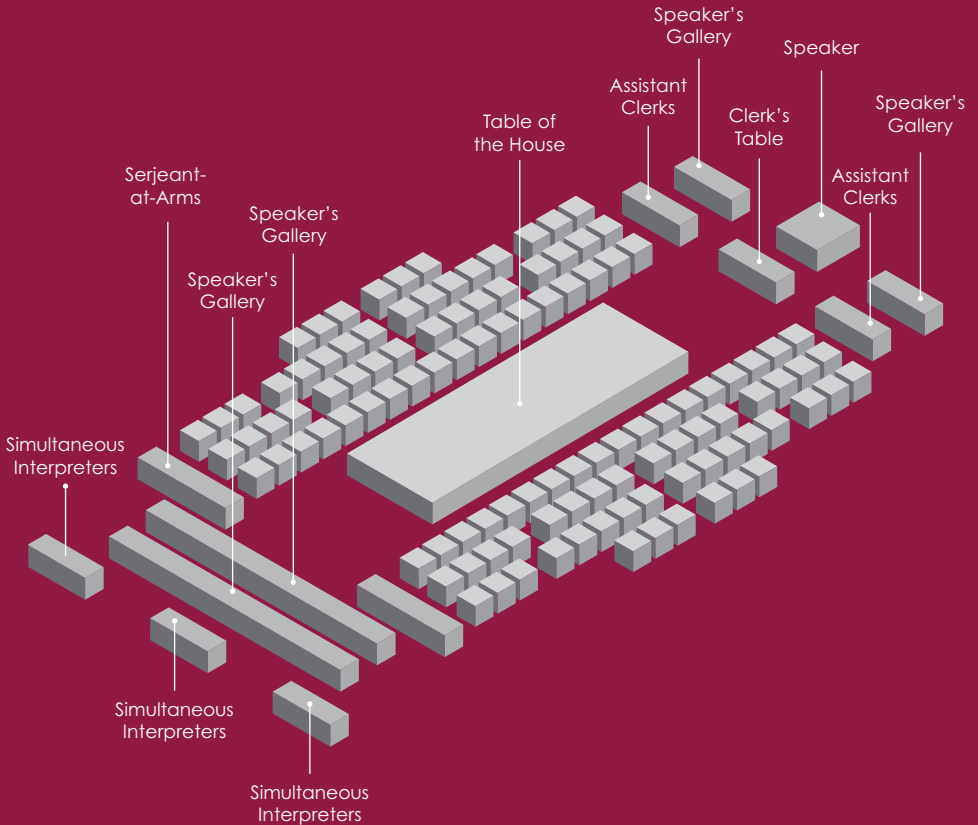
## What happens during a sitting?

The business of the House during a sitting is conducted in accordance with established rules and Parliamentary practice and takes the form of questions, statements and debates.

The order of Parliamentary business is normally as follows:



The House follows a traditional seating arrangement with Government Members of Parliament (MPs) on the Speaker's right and Non-Government MPs on the left. The House is divided into 2 halves by the Table of the House.



### Speaker of Parliament

The Speaker is elected by MPs on the first sitting of each new term of Parliament. The Speaker oversees the proceedings and enforces the rules of Parliament to ensure the smooth and orderly conduct of Parliamentary business. The Speaker decides whose turn it is to speak and regulates the speech times of MPs. The Speaker is seated at the head of the House. The Speaker is currently assisted by two Deputy Speakers.

### Prime Minister

Appointed by the President, the Prime Minister is the MP who is likely to command the confidence of the majority of MPs. In practice, the Prime Minister is usually the leader of the party which will form the government.

## Leader of the House

The Leader of the House is appointed by the Prime Minister and is responsible for the arrangement of government business and the legislative programme of Parliament. The Leader also initiates matters of a procedural nature in the House.

## Leader of the Opposition

The Leader of the Opposition is typically the leader of the largest minority party in Parliament. The duties of the Leader of the Opposition include leading the opposition in presenting alternate views in parliamentary debates on policies, Bills and motions; leading and organising scrutiny of the Government's positions and actions in Parliament; and being consulted on the appointment of opposition Members to Select Committees, including Standing Select Committees such as the Public Accounts Committee.

## Government Party Whip

The Government Party Whip is in charge of the discipline of MPs belonging to his party and is responsible for arranging the composition and order of MPs who will take part in debates and voting. An Opposition party may also have its own Whip.

## Cabinet Ministers

Cabinet Ministers are appointed by the President, upon the advice of the Prime Minister and are selected from the elected MPs from the party forming the government. The Cabinet is responsible for all government policies and the day-to-day administration of the affairs of the State.

## Elected MPs

Elected MPs are admitted into Parliament after winning a general election or by-election.

### Government MPs

MPs who belong to the ruling political party which forms the Government.

### Opposition MPs

Opposition MPs are from the political party or parties which do not form the Government.

## Non-constituency Members of Parliament (NCMPs)

The Constitution allows for up to 12 NCMPs to be declared as elected. The NCMP scheme ensures a minimum number of Opposition members in Parliament. Unsuccessful candidates who garner the highest percentage of votes among all non-government parties that lose in a general election are declared as NCMPs.

## Nominated Members of Parliament (NMPs)

In 1990, a constitutional provision was made for the appointment of up to 9 NMPs to ensure a wide representation of community views in Parliament. NMPs are members who are appointed by the President upon the recommendation of a Special Select Committee of Parliament chaired by the Speaker. Appointees are drawn from citizens who have distinguished themselves in their respective fields to contribute independent and non-partisan views in Parliament. NMPs serve a term of 2.5 years.

## Clerk of Parliament

The Clerk of Parliament is a senior public official who is also the head of the Parliament Secretariat. The Clerk serves as principal advisor to Speaker and MPs on questions relating to Parliamentary law and procedures and is assisted by a team of Assistant Clerks.

## Serjeant-at-Arms

The Serjeant-at-Arms oversees the security and order in Parliament House. He heads the Speaker's procession into the Chamber at each sitting and performs other ceremonial functions related to Parliamentary proceedings.

### Mace

The Mace is the symbol of authority and power of the Speaker and Parliament. It is placed on the upper brackets of the Table of the House when there is a sitting in Parliament and is placed at the lower brackets beneath the Table when the House is in Committee. The Mace weighs 6.8kg and is 114cm long.

# A look at the Parliamentary System of Singapore

## I. Our Parliamentary System

The Singapore Parliament, modelled after the Westminster system, is one of the 3 Organs of State, the other 2 being the Executive and Judiciary. Parliament makes laws, the Executive exercises its powers according to the laws and the Judiciary interprets the laws. Being a unicameral Parliament, the Singapore Parliament consists of one House.

A parliamentary term can last up to 5 years, starting from the date of the first sitting following the General Election. Once Parliament dissolves, a General Election must be held within the next 3 months.

Candidates in elections are voted into Parliament on a first-past-the-post basis. The candidate or team of candidates with the greatest number of votes in a constituency is declared the winner.

In Single-Member Constituencies (SMCs), the people vote for 1 candidate to represent them in Parliament.

In Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs), several constituencies are combined and the people vote for a team of between 3 and 6 candidates. At least 1 member of the GRC must be from a minority group to ensure that minority communities in Singapore are appropriately represented in Parliament.

## II. The Work of Parliament

Parliament legislates, approves the Government Budget and holds the Government accountable for its policies and programmes.



### Law-making Function

Parliament makes laws or legislates. One of its main functions is scrutinising and debating proposed legislation. Any Minister or MP may introduce a Bill (draft version of law) in Parliament.

1.5 hrs



### Critical/Inquisitorial Function

At the start of each Parliament sitting, 1.5 hours are reserved for questions and answers. During this time, MPs can raise questions with the Ministers on their respective Ministries' responsibilities. Parliament, through questioning the Ministers, holds the Government accountable for its actions and allows the public to listen to a spectrum of views and opinions to find out how decisions affecting them are made. This forms an integral part of Parliament's role.



### Financial Scrutiny

Every year, the Government will present its Budget for the coming financial year (April to March the following year) to Parliament and seek the House's approval. The Government must also seek Parliament's approval regarding breakdown or expenditure or if it wishes to impose taxes. The Budget is the Government's proposal placed before Parliament every year, showing what sums of money the Government expects to receive and how it intends to raise and spend the money.

# From Bill to Law

The stages in the consideration of Bills are as follows:

1



## First Reading

The draft version of a piece of legislation, called a Bill, is introduced in Parliament. There is no debate and the title of the Bill is read out. The Bill is made available to MPs for them to do research and prepare comments.

2

## Second Reading

The Bill's general merits and principles are debated before a vote is taken. If sufficient MPs support the Bill, the title of the Bill will be read out again, hence the term "Second Reading".



4

## Third Reading

The Bill is reported back to Parliament for review. The Bill is then voted on and passed.



3

## Committee Stage

A Bill is either referred to the Committee of the Whole Parliament or to a Select Committee comprising a smaller group of MPs. The Committee of the Whole Parliament may propose amendments, which will be voted on. A Bill is also sometimes sent to a Select Committee which may seek views from experts or focus groups. The Select Committee may propose amendments, which will be voted on.



5

## Presidential Council for Minority Rights (PCMR)

The PCMR reviews the Bill to ensure it does not disadvantage persons from any racial or religious community.



6

## Presidential Assent

The Bill is sent to the President and after presidential assent, it becomes an Act of Parliament (statute intended to become a Law).



7

The law comes into operation on the date specified in the Government Gazette.

## Gazetting



Draft laws proposed by the Government are subject to public scrutiny even before they turn up in Parliament. Government agencies routinely conduct public consultation exercises with draft laws and incorporate input from the public and relevant stakeholders before introducing them in Parliament.

# A Guide to Parliamentary Procedures



## I Parliamentary Debates

- All speeches in the House are addressed to the Speaker.
- A Motion, otherwise known as a proposal:
  - Allows MPs to raise, debate and have Parliament resolve any issue;
  - Is introduced by the MP who will speak first; and
  - Launches the House into a debate on the subject, after which a vote commences.
- Example of a Motion:
  - “That this House commemorates and honours the important contributions of the Singapore Police Force and its officers to nation building and to keeping Singapore as one of the safest countries in the world”. (moved by Mr Murali Pillai on 3 August 2021).

## II Reaching a Decision in the House

All decisions in Parliament are made through votes, which are usually taken by collections of voices. At the end of a debate, the Speaker puts the question by saying:

“As many as are of the opinion say ‘Aye’. To the contrary, say ‘No’”. The Speaker listens carefully and determines whether the “Ayes” or “Noes” have the majority support.

Sometimes, this can be less accurate and any MP supported by at least 4 others can call for a division.

In a division:

- An electronic bell is rung for 3 minutes to summon all the MPs into the Chamber;
- The Chamber doors are then locked and the Speaker puts forth the question again;
- Voting is conducted electronically;
- MPs cast their votes using voting panels at their seats; and
- The electronic display boards show the results in the Chamber.

A division is also taken when Parliament needs to determine the exact number of votes for and against a question, such as in the case of an amendment to the Constitution.

## III Budget Statement

Budget Statement Day is one of Parliament’s most talked-about sittings.

During Budget Statement Day:

- The Minister for Finance makes a speech in Parliament, called the Budget Statement, which covers the nation’s financial health and the Government’s intentions regarding revenue collection and expenditure.
- The Government presents its Budget Book, explaining how it plans to use the sum of money in the coming financial year, which begins on 1 April and ends on 31 March the following year for the Singapore Government.



# IV

## Reading an Order Paper

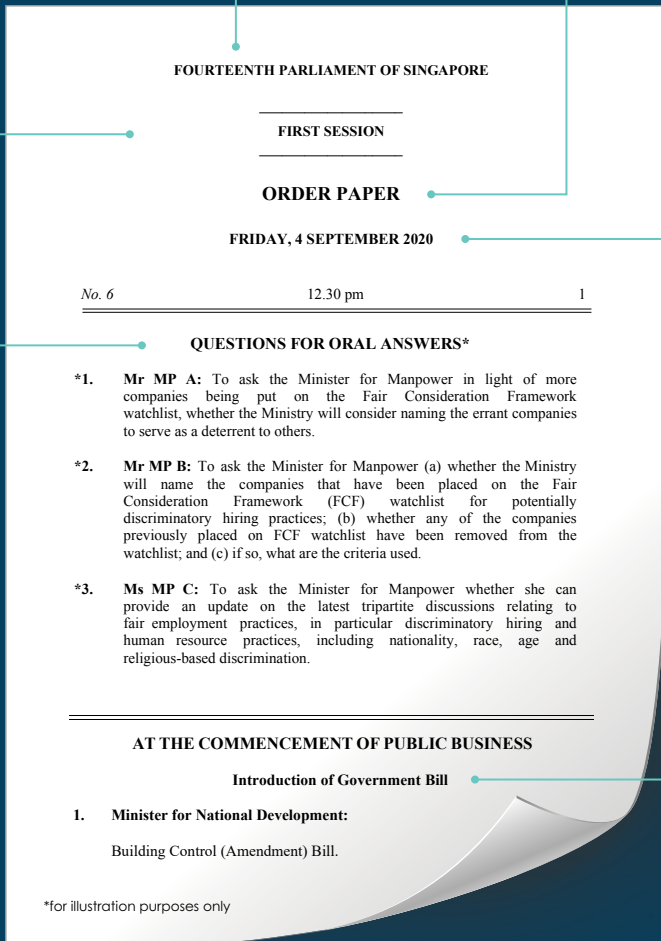
An Order Paper, which shows the agenda for the day's sitting and is arranged according to the order of business, is provided to all MPs and visitors to the House on sitting days.

The portion of the term between the Opening of Parliament and its prorogation. The term of one Parliament may have more than 1 session.

The term of each Parliament is a maximum of 5 years starting from the date of its first sitting.

The date and starting time of sitting.

Agenda for the day's sitting.



The first 1.5 hours of the sitting are reserved for questions and answers. MPs question the government on its policies and programmes. Ministers will only reply to questions listed on the Order Paper. Unanswered questions will be adjourned to the next sitting or converted to written answers. This is the inquisitorial role of Parliament.

First reading of the Bill (proposed law). The title of a Bill is read out by the Member who introduces the Bill. There is no debate at this stage.

Order of the Day: Any Bill or matter which Parliament has ordered to be discussed on a particular day.

**Sometimes the title reads:**

Order of the Day and Notice of Motion.

A Motion is a proposal for the House to do something or express its opinion on a matter. This launches the House into a debate on the subject matter, at the end of which a vote is taken.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY AND NOTICE OF MOTION

*(Those marked • are Orders of the Day)*

- 1. PRESIDENT'S SPEECH (ADDRESS OF THANKS): *Resumption of Debate on Question (31 August 2020) (5<sup>th</sup> Allotted Day)*, 'That the following Address in reply to the Speech of the President be agreed to:-

"We, the Parliament of the Republic of Singapore, express our thanks to the President for the Speech which she delivered on behalf of the Government at the Opening of the First Session of this Parliament." – (Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan).

- 2. COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) (Amendment No. 2) Bill [Bill No. 34/2020] – (Second Minister for Law) – Second Reading.

3. **Leader of the House:**

COMMITTEE OF SELECTION: That this Parliament, in accordance with paragraph (1) of Standing Order 100, appoints the following as members of the Committee of Selection:-

Ms MP A  
Mr MP B  
Ms MP C  
Mr MP D  
Mr MP E  
Mr MP F  
Mr MP G

### QUESTIONS FOR WRITTEN ANSWER

- 1. **Mr MP A:** To ask the Prime Minister how many banks with Qualifying Full Banking Licences currently grant loans to local corporations with turnovers below S\$10 million.
- 2. **Mr MP B:** To ask the Prime Minister (a) what policies is MAS studying to address climate risks posed by the high climate-risk sectors that have been identified in the Guidelines to Responsible Financing Practices published by the Association of Banks in Singapore in 2018; and (b) whether the Ministry can share how the MAS will be working with banks to develop their responsible financing policies in relation to these high climate-risk sectors.

### PAPERS PRESENTED

| 2019 |     |  | Date Presented |
|------|-----|--|----------------|
| S.L. | 772 | Goods and Services Tax (International Services) (Amendment) Order 2019 | ..... 31 Jan   |
| S.L. | 773 | Goods and Services Tax (Excluded Transactions) (Amendment) Order 2019  |                |

\*for illustration purposes only

Annual reports, accounts and papers presented to the House for information of the Members.

Some MPs may request for the Minister to answer their questions in a written form instead of giving oral answers.



## V Budget and Committee of Supply Debates

**Presentation of the Budget Statement**

The Committee of Supply (COS) will sit in Parliament for two weeks for MPs to debate the Statement and scrutinise each Government Ministry's budget for the next year.

MPs will query the Ministries' proposed expenditure and programmes; the Ministries will have to justify their required budgets to the MPs.

At the end of the COS debates, a vote is taken to pass the Supply Bill. Parliament's consent is needed for any proposed Government expenditure and imposition of taxation.

Whenever the House sits as a Committee, the Speaker becomes the Chairman and sits beside the Clerk of Parliament. The symbol of the Speaker's authority, the Mace, is also brought from the top of the Table of the House to the lower brackets.

## VI Adjournment of Parliament

To end a sitting of the House, a Minister may move the Motion, "That Parliament do now adjourn". If the Motion is agreed to, the meeting for that day ends and resumes the next sitting day. Parliament may alternatively adjourn to a specific date in the future or to "a date to be fixed".

The Motion may also be moved as a procedural device for a Member to raise a definite matter of urgent public importance for debate.

# Getting to Parliament House

Admission to the House is through the Public Entrance located along 1 Parliament Place, Singapore 178880.



## Parking

Visitors can find plenty of parking space at the underground public carpark located along Parliament Place.

## Contact Details

Parliament of Singapore

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For more information, please visit our website at [www.parliament.gov.sg](http://www.parliament.gov.sg)