A SINGAPORE FOR ALL SINGAPOREANS
Addressing the concerns of the Malay Community
A Singapore For All Singaporeans

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

SINGAPORE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Executive Summary

In September last year, the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) held a public forum to discuss matters of concern to the Malay community in Singapore. At the event, the Singapore Democrats promised that we would draw up a policy paper and make alternative proposals to address those concerns. This paper covers discussions on economic inequality, the education system, the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) and more, and discusses the way present policies in these areas put the Malay community at a disadvantage.

The central theme of the SDP’s paper is the building of a Singaporean identity. With the PAP government’s policy of flooding the country with foreigners, there is a danger that our unique Singaporean culture and identity, of which Singaporean Malays are an integral part, will be eroded.

Policy making is more than just enacting laws that regulate behaviour. It must help to develop a people who have a strong sense of nationhood and belonging to their country. Loyalty and patriotism have to go beyond just singing the national anthem and reciting the pledge. They must entail that intangible factor which binds a citizen to the sights and sounds of her homeland, and which keeps her dreams and aspirations alive.

Absent such an emotional bond, we will succeed only in building skyscrapers, not a nation. This paper seeks to build a society in which Singaporeans can develop an unbreakable bond with our nation. We can only do this if we cultivate our national culture and identity by treating our Malay community as an indispensable part of the Singaporean society.

When we develop an inclusive system, we build trust and cohesiveness among the various races in our country. With trust comes loyalty. Only then will we be able to hold together if and when a crisis befalls our nation. Such an objective has taken on added importance in the face of the dilution of who we are as Singaporeans, through the mass importation of foreigners.
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INTRODUCTION

Today, Singapore’s rich heritage is a mix of our various Asian ethnic backgrounds, passed down from early immigrants from China, India, the rest of Asia, and Europe. But the earliest records of the island being inhabited can be traced back to the 11th century reign of Parameswara, when the Nusantara people were indigenous to Southeast Asia.

Following the arrival of the British Empire, immigration to Singapore grew rapidly, with the Chinese becoming the island’s main ethnic group. With time, this segment of the population dominated commerce and, following World War II and the ejection of the colonial administration, also established itself as the main player in modern Singapore’s political ecosystem.

In 1963, Singapore became a component state of the Federation of Malaysia. Two years later, it left the Federation under vague and acrimonious circumstances when the Malaysian government, led by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), felt it was in Malaysia’s best interests that Singapore remained separate. The People’s Action Party (PAP), which was governing Singapore then, seemed to agree.

The reason for the split was portrayed by the PAP to be due to its stance on the concept of a Malaysian Malaysia. The PAP had wanted to discard UMNO’s bumiputra policy, which it saw as discriminating against non-Malays (although it had no problems with the same policy in 1963 when it campaigned wholeheartedly for merger of Singapore with the Federation). The potent mix of race-based politics simmering in Malaysia meant that Singapore also found itself embroiled in some of the ethnic conflicts that were affecting the region.

Following the riots between the Malay and Chinese communities in 1964, the division between, or at least the policies that separated, these two ethnic groups became more pronounced—even though the majority of the ordinary people in the two groups continued to live peaceably together.

To quell the disturbances, the PAP government severely proscribed discussion of race and religion
in Singapore. Policies regarding National Service (NS), public housing, education, welfare assistance, religion, etc. were introduced to address ethnic-related issues vis-à-vis internal and national security. Many in the Malay community see these policies as discriminatory and working against their interests.

In the late 1990s, the PAP government embarked on a policy to increase the Singaporean population by allowing the mass immigration of foreigners. The reasons for this have never been satisfactorily explained, and the action raised—and continues to raise—alarm among the locals.

One concern was that the Singaporean identity, of which the Malay community is an integral part, was being diluted. Decades of intermixing among the country’s main subcultures had produced a unique culture and way of life that Singaporeans identified with and wanted to protect.

**The PAP government’s response**

In August 2012, the SDP called for such issues to be addressed and organised a public forum titled *The Future Of Singapore—Do Malays Have A Part?* to highlight the Malay community’s concerns and draw up proposals that would help to resolve some of the problems that Malays in Singapore are facing.

Several days later, the Minister in charge of Muslim Affairs, Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, announced the setting up of an “independent, non-partisan committee” whose task was to gather feedback from the Malay-Muslim community on their concerns and aspirations as well as to make recommendations to address the matters raised. The committee’s findings were published in July 2013 in a report titled *Suara Musyawarah* (“voices of discussion and ideas”).

In terms of scope and depth, the report is commendable. It identifies issues that have been raised previously and repeatedly by the Malay community in Singapore.

The same problems had also already been discussed in the public forum organised by the SDP.

The recommendations put forth by the *Suara Musyawarah* committee, however, lack specificity. For example, it acknowledges the Malay community’s unhappiness at being unable to serve in certain positions in the SAF. The committee’s recommendation, however, turned out to simply be the airing of a hope that such a policy “could be continually reviewed, so that the Malay/Muslim

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1 *Suara Musyawarah: Conversations with the Community, July 2013, Suara Musyawarah Committee.*  
Many of the Suara Musyawarah’s recommendations are also piecemeal, designed to plug holes without tackling the root cause of problems. For example, the report cited that low-income families could not even afford the transport cost of sending their children to mosque-run educational programmes. It then recommended that volunteer asatizahs (religious tutors) teach groups of these children in their homes. Such a suggestion, while commendable, skirts around and fails to address the fundamental question of why some families in Singapore earn such low incomes that they cannot even afford the transport costs of sending their children to attend educational programmes.

**The myth of meritocracy**

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

The answer can be found in a critical examination of the concept of meritocracy as practiced in Singapore. The PAP government has adopted meritocracy as one of its official guiding principles for public policy formulation and the promotion of talent, spotlighting academic credentials as objective measures of merit.

Meritocracy may be effective in a developing society that is generally poor, where opportunities are abundant and where academic achievement can be a surrogate marker of drive, determination and talent. As economic

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development takes place and an upper class emerges, however, political influence and patronage of the elite work to entrench their positions and interests. This works against equal opportunity and departs from the fidelity of the concept of meritocracy.

Our society has become increasingly stratified, with an elite class being created from a narrow segment of the population. And the privileges of Singapore’s rich give them an unfair advantage over others, making socioeconomic mobility difficult. To be sure, there are cases of individuals from poor family backgrounds who make it good, but these are the exceptions. Such cases are, however, used by the entrenched elite to justify the status quo and claim that equal opportunity exists for everyone when, in fact, there is a significant problem of systemic bias against the lower classes. Even more troubling is the tendency of the PAP government to project meritocracy along racial and ethnic lines, when certain groups such as the Malays are stereotyped as less hardworking and capable.

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

The view towards Malays

Singaporeans are in general a tolerant people. In recent years, however, there has been a spate of racially offensive remarks being posted on the Internet. In 2005, three bloggers were charged under the Sedition Act for posting inflammatory comments attacking Malay Muslims.\(^3\) In 2008, a Chinese male was arrested for posting derogatory remarks about an apparently unkempt man who was riding public transport. The blogger’s comments had attacked the man’s Malay ethnicity.\(^4\) In 2012, Amy Cheong, Assistant Director of the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), was sacked by her employer after she wrote disparaging remarks on her Facebook page criticising Malays about their low-cost weddings at void-decks and their high divorce rate. She received a warning from the police.\(^5\)

Even members of the PAP have been caught making racist comments about Singaporean Malays. In 2011, Jason Neo, a member of the Young PAP, posted a photograph of a school bus filled with Malay children dressed in their traditional headwear. He captioned the picture with, “Bus filled with young terrorist trainees?”\(^6\) Neo later resigned from the party.

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6 PAP Youth Member Quits Over ‘Racist’ Online Posting, 18 November 2011, Asiaone.com, http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20111118-311261.html#sthash.m3mUha7f.dpuf
Even though quick and stern actions were taken against the culprits, the problem may be more deep-seated and complex than at first glance. Government ministers who make laws to (ostensibly) maintain religious and racial harmony have themselves demonstrated a lack of sensitivity and understanding towards the feelings of Singapore’s Malay-Muslim community.

George Yeo, when he was Minister for Foreign Affairs, was asked why the government had banned *The Satanic Verses* and not *The Last Temptation of Christ*; he said that this was because “Christians are less likely to riot”.

Lee Kuan Yew has often commented on the Malay-Muslim community in disparaging ways. In 2010, he said in an interview: “Well, we make them say the national pledge and sing the national anthem but suppose we have a famine, will your Malay neighbour give you the last few grains of rice or will she share it with her family or fellow Muslim or vice versa?”

More recently, in January 2011, he said in his book *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*: “I would say today, we can integrate all religions and races except Islam. I think we were progressing very nicely until the surge of Islam came and if you asked me for my observations, the other communities have easier integration—friends, intermarriages and so on...”

This prompted the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) to issue this statement:

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

Lee’s statements are not mere musings. National policies have been based on such an outlook. Recruitment of army personnel is discriminatory against Malay Singaporeans (see section II.3.1 below).

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7 Maintaining Harmony Here 'A Daily Struggle', *The Straits Times*, 16 March 2011.
10 Media statement: AMP responds to comments by Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew in *Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*, 27 January 2011.
Although the concerns of Malay Singaporeans merit attention, there is little national discussion on them. It seems that the PAP government’s approach is to isolate the subject within the Malay community itself. The wider public is not encouraged or given opportunities to engage the issues.

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

Some of the proposals made in this paper, such as enacting a minimum wage law or introducing a universal health-care system, are not targeted specifically at Malays but would nevertheless impact that community in a substantial way. Other proposals have been drawn up to address problems unique to Malay-Muslims in Singapore, such as ensuring that the Ministry of Defence discontinues its discriminative recruitment policy.

The primary objective of this paper is to build a national community that is inclusive and which embraces Singapore’s multiracial and multi-religious composition, not only in word, but also and more importantly in practice. In seeking to redress problematic policies, we are guided by this principle: To do no harm and to benefit all.

The SDP’s alternative proposals seek equality for the Malay community even as we reject the PAP's attempt to dilute the Singapore identity through mass importation of foreigners. We therefore encourage discussion of these issues at the national level.
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II. PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

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

Although the community recognises that there are many areas in which it can and must initiate more self-help measures, there are continued and institutionalised policies that make self-improvement difficult.

If we are to progress as a nation, whose fruits of success benefit all strata of society, the government must abandon discriminatory practices and institute practical and realistic measures that facilitate the upward progress of our Malay citizens, starting with the measures highlighted below.

II.1 Economic concerns

The challenges that Malays in Singapore continue to face are underscored by the vast income disparity between them and the country’s other main communities. Between 1990 and 2000, the rate of household income growth among the Malays was the lowest.11

In 2010, the median monthly income for Indian and Chinese households was $5,370 and $5,100 respectively—the median monthly income for Malay households, on the other hand, was $3,84412 which was 25 percent below the national average of $5,000 (see Figure 1).

The Suara Musyawarah report on the economic status of Singaporean Malays observes that “low-income families appear to be trapped in a vicious cycle. This exacerbates the community’s achievement gaps, particularly in education and income levels.”13

As Singapore continues to prosper, many in the Malay community are finding themselves in the unenviable position of being in the most disadvantaged section of the population. Under-representation in the education and economic sectors is a significant problem. The bulk of Malay businesses—up to 70 percent—is in the service sector, and serving the local market.\textsuperscript{14} From informal observation, these enterprises seem to be concentrated in the food and catering, property, and housing renovation sectors.

\textbf{II.1.1 Income inequality}

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

Wealth inequality also limits the educational progress of those in the lower-income groups. Children whose families are unable to afford expensive elite preschool education for them have less chance of doing well in early streaming examinations, which determine their long-term educational trajectories. Upon graduation, employment opportunities are much more limited for students from poorer families, and the types of jobs they secure are almost always the lower-paid ones.

\textsuperscript{14} Teo Ser Luck, speech given at the Singapore Malay Chamber of Commerce & Industry, 7 May 2013.
This vicious circle puts those already at a disadvantage further down the totem pole. Family background is a major determinant in an individual’s eventual educational attainments, especially in our current educational system, which has a highly interdependent relationship with the expensive tuition industry. This subject is discussed in more detail in our education policy paper Educating For Creativity And Equality: An Agenda For Transformation.

Academic failure and school dropout rates are dramatically higher among needy families than in well-to-do ones. This creates a culture of poverty that often leads to or incentivises criminal behaviour. Drug abuse, borrowing from loan sharks and the inability to pay one’s fees and fines most frequently arise from poverty-related issues. It comes as no surprise that unequal societies have higher incarceration rates: Singapore, with its high income inequality, has one of the highest numbers of prisoners per capita in the world.\(^\text{15}\) It is sobering to note than in 2010, Malays comprised nearly half of those arrested locally for drug abuse (see Figure 2).\(^\text{16}\)

Wide income inequality also leads to greater household debt as families struggle to stay afloat financially. According to the Association for Muslim Professionals’ (AMP) Debt Advisory Centre (DAC), Malays had a serious problem with debt. In the months after its launch in 1 April 2013, the DAC had already attended to 42 clients with debts totaling $1,130,748, owed to banks and moneylenders both legal and illegal.\(^\text{17}\) While it is important for individuals to observe financial

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Figure 2: Comparison of drug abusers by race

*Source: Central Narcotics Bureau*
responsibility and live within their means, it is also a fact that many individuals go into debt because of financial hardship. Low wages in a high-cost economy contribute to the debt problem in the Malay community.

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

II.1.2 Health care

Socioeconomic status also affects health care. Lower income groups are more likely to show greater levels of medical problems. This could be due to a range of factors, such as a lack of financial resources to maintain healthy dietary habits or having long working hours resulting in lack of time for recreation and exercise. Lack of information and health education has also adversely impacted the Malay community. The obesity, hypertension and cholesterol levels among Malays is higher than in the other ethnic groups (see Figure 3). Malys also exercised the least regularly compared to Chinese and Indians. A survey carried out by the Ministry of Health in 2010 found that Malay men had the highest prevalence of daily cigarette smoking (45.5%), followed by Chinese men (22.2%) and Indian males (17.3%).

![Comparison of occurrence of diseases across ethnic groups](image)

Figure 3: Comparison of disease occurrence by race
Source: Ministry of Health

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19 Ibid.

Clearly, there is a need for better health education among Singaporean Malays, who also need assistance in seeking medical care. Data from the National University of Singapore (NUS) showed higher rates of avoidable hospitalisation in Malays and Indians,\textsuperscript{21} and worse outcomes for heart disease in Malays\textsuperscript{22} compared with to Singaporean Chinese and Indians.

These problems are compounded by the Singapore’s high medical cost. Notably, the country’s total health expenditure was $12 billion in year 2011, while the government’s health expenditure was only $3.5 billion in the same year.\textsuperscript{23}

Singapore’s present medical financing system consists of the “3Ms”: Medisave for hospitalisation, Medishield for catastrophic illness, and Medifund as a safety net. But the reality is that the 3Ms play only a small part in financing Singapore’s health care. Singapore’s total health care expenditure in 2011 was $12 billion of which the 3Ms accounted for only one-tenth:

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

Deductibles and co-payments are significant and there are limitations. For example, the 3Ms are primarily for "inpatient care", with Medifund posing severe limitations, and Medishield having many exclusions and high premiums. Because government expenditure is low, out-of-pocket spending for Singaporeans when they are hospitalised is very high. In fact, Singapore has highest out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure in East Asia. This disproportionately affects the low-income households as it is this segment of society that has the least amount of disposable income.

One effect of such high out-of-pocket expenses is that people avoid recommended screenings and treatments. When patients put off prevention and early detection of illnesses, the cost of their actual treatments is magnified when they finally succumb to their medical problems and are hospitalised. It is notable that Singapore’s public hospitals have had $110 million in outstanding patient debts as of end 2011.\textsuperscript{24}

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

\begin{enumerate}
\item Niti, M, and Ng T P, Avoidable Hospitalisation Rates In Singapore, 1991–1998: Assessing Trends And Inequities Of Quality In Primary Care, Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health 2003; 57:17-22, \texttt{http://jech.bmj.com/content/57/1/17.long}
\item Niti, M, and Ng T P, Trends And Ethnic Differences In Hospital Admissions And Mortality For Congestive Heart Failure In The Elderly In Singapore, 1991 to 1998, Heart. 2003 August; 89(8): 865–870, \texttt{http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1767764/}
\item The SDP National Health Care Plan, 9 March 2012 Singapore Democratic Party.
\item S’poreans Owe Public Hospitals $40m In Unpaid Bills, Asiaone.com, 29 February 2012, \texttt{http://yourhealth.asiaone.com/content/sporeans-owe-public-hospitals-40mil-unpaid-bills#sthash.xaIK1baN.dpuf}
\end{enumerate}
II.1.3 The SDP’s Alternative Policies

II.1.3.1 Legislate minimum wage.
To reduce income inequality and ensure a just and living wage for low-income workers, it is essential to introduce minimum wage (the lowest level of wages an employer may legally pay an employee) legislation. This is an important policy tool that balances the needs of an economy with the need to reduce income inequality so that economic growth occurs in a sustainable manner.

The benefits of such legislation are discussed in detail in our economic paper A New Economic Vision: Towards Innovation, Equal Opportunity, and Compassion. For the purposes of this paper, it is sufficient to recognise that a minimum wage policy has several economic and social benefits:

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

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

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

Under this proposal, each retrenched worker will be allowed to reject only up to three reasonable job offers in the one-and-a-half years of the entitlement programme, following which, as stated, the retrenchment benefit ceases. Such a scheme will cushion the blow for retrenched workers while at the same time encourage them to seek reemployment.
Retrenchment payments should not be seen as added costs to taxpayers/employers but rather as an investment in our workers. Such a scheme can be funded by a combination of revenue streams from the state, employers and employed workers.

**II.1.3.3 Mandate universal health care.**

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

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

- A single-payer system, by establishing the a National Health Investment Fund (NHIF) which both the government and the people contribute to;
- Compulsory individual contributions to the NHIF, to be taken from one's Central Provident Fund (CPF) monies. The amount will average $427 per person per year (or $40 a month), depending on one's level of income (this is a fraction of what one currently pays into Medisave);
- The payment covers basic health needs, accidents and pregnancy,
- Co-payment with a cap—to emphasise personal responsibility and reduce abuse (that is, hospitalised patients pay 10 percent of their medical bill and NHIF pays the remainder, with the patient's portion capped at $2,000 in any one year),
- Issue of a Health Care Benefits Smart Card upon payment of the annual contribution in the NHIF, which entitles each holder to a $10 subsidy whenever he/she visits the family doctor. The card will also store medical information, and
utilisation and payment history, reducing administrative costs;
- A single-ward class that provides the same treatment for all as treatment should be based on one's clinical needs and not on one's ability to pay.

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

II.2 Education

If income is a function of education, as the PAP appears to purport, then it is clear that the economic disadvantages faced by the Singaporean Malay community have only been exacerbated by the PAP government’s education policies, which place obstacles in the way of socio-economic movement of the Government. As it is, socio-economic mobility prevents the formation of a permanent underclass in society, and education is key to such mobility.

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

On the other hand, such opportunities are largely not available to those in lower income groups. Being taught and/or attending school are not the only ingredients necessary for a successful education. The physical and mental well-being of a child is equally important. A poor mother with poor nutrition is likely to give birth to a baby of low birth weight, and this can affect her child’s learning abilities in later years. Children with poor nutrition are less alert, curious, and less able to interact with others and the world around them.

Children from poor families are often labelled “low achievers”, “uninterested in studies”, or “problem kids”, and consigned to slower streams. There is a tendency for Malay students to disproportionately occupy these lower levels in our current educational system. This lays the foundation for the creation of a societal underclass that is predominantly Malay.

The labelling issue also has an effect on the progress of such students at higher levels of learning. NUS political science tutor at the NUS, Walid Jumblatt, pointed out that Malays lag behind Chinese
and Indians in university enrolment: The percentage of Malays enrolled in universities in Singapore was 5 percent, compared to 22 percent for the Chinese and 35 percent for Indians.\textsuperscript{25}

\textit{II.2.1 Preschool education}

One of the fundamental problems that the Malay community faces is a lack of equal opportunity for strong foundational learning at the preschool level due to the community’s economic marginalisation. Even at this early stage, there is already a difference in mental and social development between the various social classes and ethnic groups. The Suara Musyawarah committee noted, “It is critical to ensure that Malay/Muslim children have access to quality pre-school education,”\textsuperscript{26} while lamenting the fact that “Many low-income children in our community are not school-ready for the expectations of the first year of basic education.”\textsuperscript{27}

By the time a child enters primary school, there is already a wide gap in the developmental and educational standards between of children of from different social backgrounds. Primary schools are unable to remedy this deficiency because the class sizes are too big and teachers are rushing to complete the classroom curriculum. Only with a good preschool foundation can this gap be closed.

According to Harvard University’s National Scientific Council on the Developing Child: “Children who develop warm, positive relationships with their kindergarten teachers are more excited about learning, more positive about coming to school, more self-confident and achieve more in the classroom.”\textsuperscript{28}

\textit{II.2.2 Scholarships}

Many promising students at the pre-university level are awarded state scholarships by the Public Service Commission (PSC). The stated objective of this is "finding and grooming the right people" to ensure that those with "the right capabilities and values are brought in to serve as public officers."\textsuperscript{29} Scholarship holders are then funded to study at reputable universities and, upon graduation, serve in the Public Service.

Between 2009 to 2013, the PSC awarded 380 scholarships of which only six, or 0.015 percent, were given to Malays (or at least, recipients with Malay-Muslim names).

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{25} Presented during the SDP Public Forum held on 8 September 2012.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{26} Suara Musyawarah: Conversations with the Community, July 2013, Suara Musyawarah Committee.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{28} Young children develop in an environment of relationships Working Paper No. 1, National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 2004, \url{http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/reports_and_working_papers/working_papers/wp1/}}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{29} Singapore Public Service Commission Annual Report 2012, \url{http://www.psc.gov.sg/content/dam/psc/annual_reports/PSC%20Annual%20Report%202012.pdf}}}
PSC scholars are, as pointed out above, groomed for senior positions within the Public Service. It stands to reason that with disproportionately fewer Malay awardees, there will also be fewer Malays occupying high-level appointments in the civil service. Indeed, a survey of the Permanent Secretary and Deputy Permanent Secretary positions, of which there are more than 50, shows clearly that, as of the publication of this paper in 2012, none are Malays. Also, none of the senior civil servants assisting the various ministers in the Prime Minister's Office are Malays.30

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

For the President's Scholarship, the Commission appoints a Selection Committee consisting of the PSC chairman and not more than three persons representing the institutions of higher learning in Singapore. The Committee bases its selection of President’s Scholars on both “general and specific

standards” that include scholastic ability, co-curricular record, character and personality. In any one year, the number of such scholarships to be awarded is capped at 10. Of the 228 President’s Scholarships awarded from 1966 to 2007, only 14 (6.1 percent) went to minority ethnic students. This percentage dropped to a low of 3.5 percent in the years following 1981, despite the fact that ethnic minority groups make up more than 20 percent of Singapore’s population.

When Adil Hakeem Mohamad Rafee was awarded the President’s Scholarship in 2012, he became the first Malay recipient in 44 years. Only two Malay students have ever received this scholarship (the other was Ismail Ibrahim, who received the award in 1968).

The number of scholarships given by the SAF to individuals of minority status appears to be even more lopsided. Though the Ministry of Defence does not publish recipients of SAF scholarships, it is estimated that as little as 2 percent of the awards given between 1971 and 2005 went to non-Chinese applicants.

II.2.3 Special Assistance Plan (SAP) Schools

SAP schools, which theoretically support academically gifted students regardless of ethnicity, cater mainly to Chinese students in practice. The aim of such schools, first established in 1979, is “to preserve the ethos of the Chinese medium schools” and to enhance “the learning of Chinese language, culture, and values” while grooming bright Singaporean Chinese students to have a strong command of both English and Mandarin. SAP schools are funded and run by the state.

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

II.2.4 Madrasahs

These schools, aimed at providing formal religious education for Malays and other Muslims in Singapore, have existed for more than a century. Funded largely by merchants within the local

31 President’s Scholarships Regulations, 11 May 2011, http://www.pscscholarships.gov.sg/content/dam/pscsh/pdf/President-s%20Scholarships%20Regulations%202011.pdf
33 5 Receive President’s Scholarship Award, The Straits Times, August 16, 2012.
34 Barr, The Charade Of Meritocracy.
Muslim community comprising Arabs, Indian Muslims, and Malays, madrasah education has become very much a part of the Malay-Muslim way of life.

Unlike government-aided Christian schools, Chinese-aided schools and SAP schools, madrasahs receive neither recognition as a formal educational institution nor funding from the state. The Muslim community raises its own funds in order to manage and finance its six full-time madrasahs. Donations received from the community for Dana Madrasah (madrasah fund) is being managed by Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS; Islamic Religious Council of Singapore). In 2012, $1.04 million was disbursed to the six madrasahs.\footnote{8.5 Million Given To Madrasahs In The Last 5 Years, \textit{Berita Harian}, 15 August 2012.}

State funding of madrasahs has long been denied because the PAP government regards these schools as religious institutions. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong belatedly acknowledged this inequity when he announced during his National Day Rally in August 2013 that madrasah students would be given access to Edusave funds, which other Singaporean children enjoy.\footnote{NDR 2013: Edusave extended to include madrasah students, \url{http://www.straitstimes.com/breaking-news/singapore/story/ndr-2013-edusave-extended-include-madrasah-students-20130818}}

\textbf{II.2.5 Tertiary Tuition Fee Subsidy (TTFS)}

Malay parents, like parents in other communities, know that education is the basis on which their children can achieve success. Singaporean Malays are motivated to raise the educational performance of their children so as to catch up with the rest of society. In order to help the Malay population to catch up with tertiary education, fees for Malay students at tertiary institutions were waived. However, the PAP government did away with the policy in 1991, requiring Malay students to pay fees.\footnote{Frequently Asked Questions On Revised TTFS Scheme For Malay Students, \url{http://www.mendaki.org.sg/upload_files/cuteeditor/Document/FAQs%20for%20Mendakis%20Website}}
The waiver was replaced by a means test; households with a monthly income exceeding $3,000 would no longer qualify for any assistance. As of 1 January 2011, the criteria for subsidy eligibility are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household (per capita) income ($)</th>
<th>Subsidy Eligible (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1,000 and below</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,001 to 1,200</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,201 to 1,500</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

II.2.6 The SDP’s Alternative Policies

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

II.2.6.1 Nationalise pre-school education.

The SDP proposes that the Ministry of Education undertake the running of pre-school and kindergarten education. Trained educators will be employed to provide preschoolers with the requisite literacy, numeracy and social skills to cope with standards required at primary school level.

The present system of kindergartens run by the PAP, albeit through its foundation, will be abolished. Such a measure will equalise the quality of kindergarten education. Details on the SDP’s policy regarding preschool education are available in our education policy paper, Educating For Creativity And Equality: An Agenda For Transformation.
II.2.6.2 Make award process transparent.
While it is recognised that the selection of candidates for state scholarships requires an evaluation process that must, to a degree, be subjective, steps must be taken to ensure that these scholarships are awarded without prejudice. For instance, PSC guidelines regulating the selection of President’s Scholars state that candidates must “refrain from participating in activities which are, or are likely to be, inimical to the interests or security of Singapore”. Given that the leaders of the PAP government, in particular Lee Kuan Yew, have openly questioned the loyalty of Malays in Singapore, and that the SAF adopts a recruitment policy of limiting Malays within its ranks (see section below), has such a stipulation adversely impacted Malay students when it comes to shortlisting nominees for President’s Scholarships?

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

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

II.2.6.3 Revise TTFS cut-off
Tuition and other educational fees have increased through the years. In March 2013, the PAP government raised fees in many academic institutions from the Institutes for Technical Education to the polytechnics and universities. Fees at NUS, for example, were raised by as much as eight 8 percent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Amount ($)</th>
<th>Increase(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Social Sciences</td>
<td>7,650</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>8,950</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>10,800</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>23,050</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Increase of university fees in 2013
(Source: Universities, Polytechnics And ITE Raise Tuition Fees, The Straits Times, 30 March 2013)

The SDP recommends a higher household income cut-off for Malay students to qualify for TTFS. For details on the specific cut-off point and other elaborations on the topic, please
refer to our education policy paper, Educating For Creativity And Equality: An Agenda For Transformation.

**II.2.6.4 Expand SAP school system.**
The SAP school regime will be expanded to include the teaching of Malay and Tamil as mother tongue languages. Such a measure will enable Malay and Indian students to be enrolled in SAP schools. This will help to create a more inclusive school environment where students are exposed to various cultures instead of the present segregated system. Such exposure will foster the development of a national identity and culture.

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

**II.3. Discrimination**

**II.3.1 Singapore Armed Forces**

National Service (NS) was introduced in Singapore in 1967. Basically, male citizens who had turned 18 were conscripted to serve in the military for at least two years. Shortly after its implementation, Malays were no longer called up for such service.\(^{39}\) In 1977, the policy was changed again to require Malay males to perform NS duties, but they were restricted to the police force and civil defence (fire brigade).

All this time, the PAP government adopted a policy of neither admitting nor denying the barring of Malays from the armed forces. In 1987, however, Lee Hsien Loong, who was then Second Minister for Defence, remarked that, “if there is a conflict, if the SAF is called to defend the homeland, we do not want to put any of our soldiers in a difficult position where his emotions for the nation may be in conflict with his religion.”40 He was, of course, referring to Malay-Muslims in Singapore.

His father, Lee Kuan Yew, has also stated that Malay Singaporeans cannot be trusted to serve in the armed forces. Lee senior said that, “If, for instance, you put in a Malay officer who’s very religious and who has family ties in Malaysia in charge of a machine gun unit, that's a very tricky business. We’ve got to know his background...I'm saying these things because they are real, and if I don’t think that, and I think even if today the Prime Minister doesn’t think carefully about this, I and my family could have a tragedy.”41 He added in 2011: “We've got friendly neighbours? Grow up...There is this drive to put us down because we are interlopers,” he said, citing alleged Malaysian and Indonesian efforts to undermine Singapore’s crucial port business.42

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

It is clear that the Malay/Muslim community has a strong sense of belonging to Singapore. For some, this is due to a sense of history and heritage. For others, especially the young, this is a given—they have grown up in this country, and many of their experiences, from school to national service, are shared with other Singaporeans.43

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

In the event of an armed conflict where, in the words of Lee Kuan Yew and Lee Hsien Loong, a soldier’s emotions come into conflict with his religion, it is not only the Malay soldier that the

41 Ibid.
42 Lee Kuan Yew Urges Muslims To 'Be Less Strict', AFP, Jan 23, 2011, http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hmM9iHjT7TGWAC-MZv19_oNqX3zw?docId=CNG.4f8b988b9f9ebd1a5e9a9eba15740136c8.b81
43 Suara Musyawarah: Conversations with the Community, July 2013
nation must be careful of but also the entire community of Malays on the island. In practical terms, how will Singapore fight a war with Malay-Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia if we cannot depend on Singaporean Malays to fight alongside us? Is the PAP government going to force half-a-million Malays in Singapore into internment camps like what the US did to Japanese Americans during World War II? If not, then how do we, if we so distrust our fellow citizens to the extent that we prohibit them from the military, deal with the Malay-Muslims within our borders while fighting Malay-Muslims outside?

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

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

A final note on this topic: Historically, it was an offence for employers to recruit male workers before they had completed NS. Such being the case, many Malay youths found themselves unable to secure jobs then because they had not been called up for NS. They were shunned by prospective employers who feared prosecution. Unable to find employment, many turned to drugs—this set a precedent that may have contributed to the disproportionately high percentage of drug abusers among Malays.

II.3.2 Housing

Housing in Singapore has become increasingly expensive, especially in the last decade or so. According to the Population Census Report 2010, all ethnic groups saw a decrease in overall homeownership. Nearly 98 percent of Malays in Singapore live in Housing and Development Board (HDB) flats and almost a third live in 1-, 2- and 3-room flats.

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45 Suara Musyawarah: Conversations with the Community, July 2013.
Housing in Singapore consumes a disproportionate sum of Singaporeans’ income and retirement savings (most Singaporeans use a significant portion of their CPF to pay for their housing mortgages). This puts a lot of financial pressure on flat owners, especially those from the lower-income groups. Many retirees also have little or no income because they have used their pension savings to purchase their homes. And given that the Singaporean population is also ageing rapidly, working adults will soon not only have their children to provide for but also have their retired parents to take care of.

The Malay community is further disadvantaged by the PAP government’s policy of forcible integration, or its Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP). The EIP was introduced ostensibly to promote racial integration and harmony and to “prevent the formation of racial enclaves by ensuring a balanced ethnic mix among the various ethnic communities living in public housing estates.”

But the resultant fragmenting of Malay families across different neighbourhoods suppresses the political voice of the Malay community, which is believed to be less inclined to support the PAP. By preventing its members from forming a significant voting block in any constituency, the Malay

46 Ethnic Integration Policy & SPR quota, HDB website, 
community cannot elect its preferred representatives. As a result, the interests of the Malay community are frequently ignored and unrepresented. This weakens its ability to protect itself against unfair treatment and discrimination.

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

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

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

II.3.3 Employment discrimination

Workplace discrimination is becoming a worrying trend. As the number of foreigners establishing businesses in Singapore increases, it has also become clearer that many of these employers have signaled their preference for hiring fellow foreigners, especially those from their native countries. In turn, Malay Singaporeans have encountered employers who they say have discriminated against them. Businesses, in job advertisements and interviews, often indicate that available positions are only open to non-Malays, citing the need for specific language skills even though the jobs in question do not require such skills. The need for anti-discrimination in the employment sector is apparent.

II.3.4 The SDP’s Alternative Policies

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

II.3.4.1 End racial discrimination in the SAF.
The SDP will open up all branches of the armed forces to able-bodied young males of all races and backgrounds who are Singapore citizens. To achieve this objective, the government will set up the SAF Commission for Integration (SAFCI) to ensure that composition of NS servicemen in the various services, including the police and civil defence, reflect Singapore’s racial composition. The SAFCI will also ensure that the selection of commissioned and non-commissioned officers and the system of posting officers to the various military units and vocations are carried out on a performance-based system regardless of race or religion.

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

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

II.3.4.3 Implement the NOM scheme.
To overcome the problem of unaffordable public housing, the SDP aims to introduce a double-tiered system for HDB flat sales: Open Market (OM) and Non-Open Market (NOM) schemes.

The OM scheme is essentially the current system—flat owners buy Build-To-Order (BTO) flats or ballot for existing flats at current prices (which include land cost). They are allowed sell their flats in the open market to willing buyers.

The NOM scheme, on the other hand, allows buyers to purchase their flats at a steeply reduced rate from the HDB. This is possible because the prices do not include land costs. As the name suggests, however, NOM flat owners cannot sell their flats in the open market; they have to sell them back to the HDB minus the
The advantage of the NOM scheme is that it frees up homeowners’ capital (both from bank loans and/or CPF funds) for other types of investment, retirement or education. Details of this double-tiered system can be read in the SDP’s housing policy paper Housing A Nation: Sound Policies For Affordable Homes.

II.4. Malay Organisations

In 1992, the PAP government mooted the idea of self-help organisations to help less successful individuals.\(^{48}\) This would be organised along racial lines. As a result, the Chinese Development Assistance Council, the Singapore Indian Development Association, and the Eurasian Association were established or co-opted into the initiative. Yayasan MENDAKI (Council for the Development of Singapore Malay/Muslim Community) was set up in 1980. The thinking was that Singaporeans would be more willing to provide assistance to individuals of their own races.

Such an outlook drives the wedge further between the ethnic groups and creates greater imbalance between the resources available to the groups. By sheer volume, the Chinese would be better funded. MENDAKI, on the other hand, would have a significantly smaller pool from which to draw contributions\(^ {49}\) even though the needs of the Malay community may be proportionately larger.

For Malays, besides Yayasan MENDAKI, there are also MUIS and the AMP, which render assistance to vulnerable members of the Malay community.

II.4.1 Yayasan MENDAKI

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

\(^{48}\) A place for all, Today Online, 6 July 2015, http://m.todayonline.com/rememberinglky/place-all

\(^{49}\) Contributions are on an opt-out system. Individuals who earn more than $2,000 per month would have $1.00 deducted from the salaries, those earning less that $2,000 would have $0.50 deducted.
board.\(^{50}\)

Given such an overwhelming PAP presence within its ranks, MENDAKI has become politicised. The result is an organisation unable to pursue its original objectives. After more than 30 years of MENDAKI's existence, the majority of Malays are still lagging behind in the educational sector. For example, 88 percent of the Primary 1 cohort of Malay students made it to post-secondary education in 2011, compared to 75 percent 10 years ago.\(^{51}\) Although the percentage has been increasing, the number is still lower than the national statistic of 94 percent (up from 88 percent in 2002).\(^{52}\)

**II.4.2 The Presidential Council for Minority Rights (PCMR)**

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

- To draw attention to any Bill or subsidiary legislation that contains differentiating measures; and
- To consider and report on matters affecting any racial or religious community that are referred to the Council by Parliament or the Government.\(^{53}\)

As of 15 July 2012, the PCMR comprises Attorney-General Steven Chong Horng Siong, Professor Chan Heng Chee, Mr Barry Desker, Mr Philip Jeyaretnam, Mr JY Pillay, Archbishop Nicholas Chia Yeck Joo, and Mr Othman bin Haron Eusofe.\(^{54}\)

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

**II.4.3 The SDP's Alternative Policies**

Organisations like the MENDAKI and PCMR play an important role in helping to minimise discrimination against the Malay community. Unfortunately, restrictions and political control have meant that these organisations have been ineffective in bringing about meaningful change. Reforms in the make-up and administration of these organisations are necessary.\(^{55}\)

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

The SDP proposes the establishment of a Committee of Singaporeans for Singaporeans (CSS), which will be tasked to determine the level of social spending needed to assist vulnerable segments of society across all ethnic groups as well as administer the funds. Funds will be disbursed to the various community organisations, including MENDAKI, based on need. These community organisations will have the task of applying the funds according to the needs of the community.

Such a model transcends ethnic boundaries and ensures a more equitable allocation of finances when it comes to social assistance. It also allows organisations like MENDAKI to focus on planning and implementing their agenda instead of expending resources to raise funds.

The CSS’s budget will be derived from the Government, which will increase social spending in the annual Budget from present levels. The expenditure estimates for social spending are presented in the SDP’s economics paper, A New Economic Vision: Towards Innovation, Equal Opportunity, and Compassion.

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

II.4.3.2 Reform MENDAKI leadership structure.
The current structure where the Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs chairs MENDAKI’s board of directors unnecessarily politicises the organisation and renders its decision-making process less than optimal.

MENDAKI’s governing body (and, for that matter, the governing bodies of all community organisations that receive state funding) will be nominated on a two-year term by civil society organisations (e.g. AMP), academe (e.g. The Centre for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs), religious groups (e.g. MUIS), business associations, etc. Again, this should be subject to a confirmation process by Parliament.

MENDAKI should also open more branches in housing estates to improve the organisation’s accessibility.

55 While the SDP recognises that some members of the Malay-Muslim community have cited problems regarding MUIS’ relations with the PAP government, we feel that the subject, being a religious matter, is better tackled by the Malay-Muslim community.
II.4.3.3 PCMR accountable to Parliament.
Members of the PCMR will be nominated by the President after every Presidential election, but confirmed by Parliament through a public hearing process. The Council will be answerable to Parliament.
The SDP is committed to building a truly democratic and progressive multicultural nation wherein every citizen, irrespective of race, would be proud to call himself or herself a Singaporean. The party regards the problems faced by the Malay community not as a communal issue to be tackled only by its members, but rather a national issue with implications for all Singaporeans.

Left unattended, the problems that beset our Malay-Muslim citizens will worsen and the unhappiness of the community will breed even stronger resentment. The current status quo is detrimental to the future well-being and progress of our nation. This is why we have drawn up this alternative policy paper and to encourage the study of the issues at the national level.

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