

Background to the Community Engagement Programme

After the London bombings in July 2005, we asked ourselves whether we should do more to enhance our social resilience. While we think that our good communal relations built up over the years would stand us in good stead, we also realise that this cannot be taken for granted.

2 We know that, in the immediate aftermath of a crisis, it could be difficult for communities to remain calm and avoid knee-jerk reactions. **Communities need to trust each other and know what needs to be done to stay united before any crisis strikes.** Having strong networks of trust and being committed to maintaining good relations is important.

3 **But we need to do more – we need to exercise and prepare people to know what to do and what to expect in a crisis.**

What is the CEP?

4 The Community Engagement Programme (CEP) is a long-term effort to ensure that we are better equipped to maintain our social cohesion and harmony, should a crisis happen in Singapore. We want to bring together Singaporeans from different communities, to strengthen inter-communal bonds, and to put in place response plans to help deal with potential communal tensions after an incident, be it a terrorist attack or a civil emergency.

Bottom-Up Approach

5 In the dialogue sessions and discussions with community leaders, we have received good feedback and views. One recurrent view is that in order **for the CEP to be self-sustaining, it needs to be facilitated by Government but driven from bottom-up.** People and groups from the ground need to take ownership of initiatives. Hence one of the things we want to avoid is creating new layers of organisations and new structures. The Government can facilitate and offer support and resources to help the process along. People on the ground know their own domains best.

6 The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is the overall coordinating ministry, and is supported by 5 key *clusters* of communities: i) the educational institutions (under MOE¹), ii) the media (under MICA²), iii) the businesses and

¹ MOE : Ministry of Education

² MICA : Ministry of Information, Communications and The Arts

unions (under MOM³), iv) grassroots organisations (under PA⁴) and lastly, v) the religious groups, ethnic-based organisations and voluntary welfare organisations (under MCYS⁵).

These 5 clusters provide the respective interface between the communities and the Government.

7 On the part of facilitating CEP efforts, we have put together numerous resources that the community could make use of. A listing of available resources is at **Annex A**.

8 Since the launch of the CEP, there have been a growing number of local initiatives from individuals, groups and organisations across society. Indeed, communities can, and have been stepping forward in the areas of:-

- **Building awareness** of Singapore's diversity and the need for racial and religious harmony;
- **Building understanding and forging bonds**;
- **Involvement and participation** from the community; and
- **Building capacity** to enhance social resilience, e.g. through exercises.

Working Together with the Community

9 In addition, the MHA departments (e.g. Singapore Police Force and Singapore Civil Defence Force) have been working with the community on safety and security issues, such as in the Neighbourhood Watch Zone Scheme and to promote fire safety. CEP is therefore not very different from these current community outreach efforts. It is an extension of ongoing efforts to involve the community in tackling safety and security issues at the local neighbourhood level, learning specific skills in emergency preparedness such as first aid and response to fires.

10 The following are examples of initiatives which involved the community:-

- CEP Emergency Preparedness Exercise, an Integrated Contingency Plan –
 - Emergency Preparedness (EP) Exercises have to go beyond rescue and recovery to cover the readiness to detect and prevent the fallout from potential communal tensions in a crisis. The exercise at Changi Village last year

³ MOM : Ministry of Manpower

⁴ PA : People's Association

⁵ MCYS : Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports

was to address both the physical and psycho-social dimensions of managing a crisis. The exercise saw the participation of ethnic and religious establishments in the exercise area. The psycho-social dimension of the crisis was developed and exercised as part of the exercise scenario to address post-incident trauma and resilience issues;

- Volunteer bodies participated in this new area which can be a potential new role for befrienders and counselors;
- SMS crisis communications project (ongoing) – using the short messaging system (sms) as the platform to send information to constituents in a crisis.

11 There is a need for individuals to move from passive awareness to active involvement. An example of active involvement is The Ready Bag Programme – Get Ready*Be Ready*Stay Ready⁶. A tangible outcome of this involves preparing a Ready Bag for the family and customising it to the needs of the family. More importantly, the individual recognises the need to be prepared for emergencies and crises. By being prepared, we will not panic.

Community Initiatives

12 The community can also contribute in the areas of building awareness, understanding and forging bonds. More CEP-related events can be found at the Singapore United portal (www.SingaporeUnited.sg):-

- Last year, the Yuhua grassroots organisations held a CEP workshop to share the concept of CEP and the need for emergency preparedness with its constituents.
 - Together, they brainstormed and came up with practicable response plans for their precinct in the event of a crisis happening in their neighbourhood.
- The Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations (SFCCA) and the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI) set up a CEP taskforce in Mar 2006 to forge closer ties with other communal groups.
 - One of its initiatives was a Job Fair for Malay workers in Sep 2006, which was organised in collaboration with Social Enterprise Network Singapore (SENSE) and Mendaki.

⁶ More information on the Ready Bag can be found at http://app3.mha.gov.sg/ready_sg.aspx?pageid=128

- On 2 Jan 2007, an Inter-faith Forum on "World Religions and Search for Peaceful Co-existence" was organised by the University Scholars Programme, Ba'alwie Mosque and Inter-Religious Organisation to discuss the importance of inter-faith understanding and ways to enhance it.
 - The forum was attended by about 450 diplomats, local and foreign religious leaders, students, and the public. On the same day, an Inter-faith dinner was held for 1,400 religious leaders and followers from different faiths and countries.
- There were also inter-faith dialogues held at the neighbourhood level:
 - One such dialogue was organised by Choa Chu Kang, Keat Hong and Yew Tee grassroots organisations and Al-Khair Mosque for their community leaders and residents on 7 Jan 2007.
 - A group of young Singaporeans also organised the Singapore Inter-faith Youth Forum 2007 on 29 Jan 2007 for their fellow youths to clear misconceptions they might have about other religions.
- Taman Bacaan organised the Youth Convention 2007 on "Fighting Terrorism: Preventing the Radicalisation of Youth in a Secular and Globalised World", in collaboration with Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), in Jan 2007.
 - The convention, which was attended by students of different religious faiths from JCs, secondary schools, ITE colleges and madrasahs, aimed to help youths guard against radicalism. It also helped non-Muslims better understand how Muslims oppose radicalism, and clear misconceptions about Islam.
- In July 07, Taman Bacaan also held a Convention for Madrasah students, in collaboration with Madrasah Aljunied, Inter Agency Aftercare Committee and the Religious Rehabilitation Group, to highlight the threat and dangers of violent extremist trends today
- In Feb 2007, the National Junior College's Malay Language, Drama and Debate Society (MLDDS), with the support of Mendaki Club, organised a dialogue session on the threat of terrorism for Junior College students.

How can I get Involved?

13 At the individual level, how then can we get involved? Here are some suggestions⁷: -

- **Understand the need for the Community Engagement Programme**
- **Live, work, play and study together in racial and religious harmony, while enjoying the diversity and richness of individual races and religions**
- **Get trained to cope with crises and emergencies**
 - Readiness can help us lower our vulnerabilities;
 - At the individual level, we must be prepared to cope with emergencies, and get trained, so that we know how to respond;
 - There is a wide range of programmes in essential civil defence skills and knowledge. These include the Emergency Preparedness Days in the various constituencies, exercises, distribution of educational materials, training tools and community events.
- **Be resilient**
 - During a crisis, we need to remain calm and ensure that our way of living can return to normalcy in the shortest possible time
 - Resilience is sustained by a commitment that is not intimidated by terrorism, does not give in to fears and anxieties – but to be confident in our survival as a society
- **Be ready**
 - At the individual level, we can ensure that we are ready by putting in place an "emergency plan" for ourselves and our loved ones. When we are prepared and have a plan, we will not panic. Such a plan can take many forms, for example, keeping ready items which would come in useful in an emergency, All these can go into a "Ready Bag" which we can "grab & go" in an emergency.

**Our survival as a nation depends on us.
Let us work together to keep Singapore resilient and united.**

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<sup>7</sup> More details and translations of "How Can I Get Involved?" in Malay, Chinese and Tamil can be found at the Singapore United portal ([www.SingaporeUnited.sg](http://www.SingaporeUnited.sg))

## **ANNEX A**

### **Resources available:**

#### **\*CEP Poster**

1 This is a poster done in cartoon form by Miel of the Straits Times. It explains CEP in simple terms. The poster is available in English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. It is also available on the Singapore United portal for downloading.

#### **\*CEP video**

2 This is a video explaining the CEP. There is also a shorter clip that lasts one minute. The videos are available on the Singapore United portal.

#### **\*CEP booklet**

3 This is a booklet on the CEP, explaining what it is and what is involved. This booklet, with explanations in the four official languages, is also available for downloading at the Singapore United portal.

#### **\*Podcasts**

4 We have produced a series of 3 podcasts inspired by real-life stories, and the teasers were aired over MediaCorp Radio, namely Class 95FM, Warna 94.2FM, FM95.8 城市频道 and Oli 96.8FM. Each story carries the message that we need each other more than we realise.

5 DJs from Class 95FM, Warna 94.2FM, FM95.8 城市频道 and Oli 96.8FM also spoke on the Community Engagement Programme.

6 You can listen to the podcasts on the Singapore United portal.

#### **\*Singapore United – the portal on the Community Engagement Programme**

7 As more organisations, groups and individuals participate in the Community Engagement Programme or CEP, one of the challenges we face is how to keep everyone involved or interested in the CEP connected and informed of what others across the various clusters are doing.

8 We have held workshops and seminars to share best practices and ideas, as well as to network and affirm friendships. However, on a sustained, day-to-day basis we needed something more. So we decided to leverage on the Internet to facilitate such interaction and contact on a day-to-day basis. Hence, we have set up ***Singapore United***, the portal for CEP.

9 *Singapore United* is a simple platform for communication and dialogue within the CEP community as well as a point of contact between the CEP

community and the general public. It is a shared and common space for us to interact and engage each other via the Internet.

10 The portal is not just a means for promoting CEP awareness and messages, but more importantly, it serves as a platform for the CEP Secretariat and the Cluster Lead Agencies (which comprises government agencies) to engage the CEP community, and the public as a whole. The portal was launched during the National Seminar on CEP on 24 Mar 2007.

11 The key features of the portal are as follows:

- a) The portal has a calendar which lists upcoming, present and past CEP-related events and activities. Members of the public can access the calendar to find out details of the events such as venue, objectives, contact details and even download the entry into their personal mobile calendar systems. Brochures and photos, where available, are included in the events calendar. The calendar serves as an on-line repository and archive of CEP-related events.
- b) Singapore United has archival capabilities where CEP-related materials and resources are stored on the portal under the "Resources" section. There is also a multi-media gallery under the "Resources" section where visitors can view CEP videos. Over time, the portal will become an on-line repository for CEP-related information and materials, and will facilitate research in CEP-related matters.
- c) Users can subscribe to the Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed which is available for certain pages, such as News Room and Calendar of CEP events. The subscriber will then be updated automatically whenever a new article is posted.
- d) Members of the public can give feedback and suggestions (in English or other languages) to the CEP Secretariat using an online form, which allows for the attachment of documents/files. Alternatively, feedback and suggestions can be faxed to the Secretariat.

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