

SINGAPORE 2016 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Singapore is a parliamentary republic where the People's Action Party (PAP), in power since 1959, overwhelmingly dominated the political scene. Observers considered the 2015 general election as open and free, with the major opposition party winning six seats in Parliament. Observers also considered the by-election held in 2016 as open and free, with the major opposition party winning the contested seat.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces.

The government has broad powers to limit citizens' rights. Parliament passed the Administration of Justice (Protection) Bill, which seeks to prevent interference in and influence over cases before the High Court or Court of Appeals by clarifying conduct constituting contempt of court. The government could and did censor the media (from television shows to websites) if it determined that the content would undermine social harmony or criticize the government. The Internal Security Act (ISA) permitted preventive detention without warrant, filing of charges, or normal judicial review; in recent years the government used it against alleged terrorists and not against persons in the political opposition.

Additional reported human rights problems included the following: Caning is an acceptable punishment for some crimes; restrictions existed on free speech and assembly; government intimidation led to self-censorship by journalists; and there were some restrictions on freedom of religion and on labor rights.

The government prosecuted officials who committed human rights abuses, although there were no instances of such prosecutions reported during the year. There were no reports of impunity involving the security forces.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits such practices, and the government generally respected these prohibitions.

The law mandates caning, in addition to imprisonment, as punishment for approximately 30 offenses involving violence, such as certain cases of rape and robbery, and for nonviolent offenses, such as vandalism, drug trafficking, and violation of immigration laws. Caning is discretionary for convictions on other charges involving the use of force, such as kidnapping or voluntarily causing grievous hurt. Caning also may be used as a punishment for misbehavior while in prison; such punishment must be approved by the commissioner of prisons and reviewed by the Institutional Discipline Advisory Committee before being executed. Women, men over age 50 or under age 16, men sentenced to death whose sentences were not commuted, and persons determined medically unfit are exempt from punishment by caning. From January to October, the courts sentenced 1,257 persons to judicial caning, and authorities carried out 987 caning sentences, including on 373 foreigners. In 2014 authorities charged two German citizens with vandalism. In March 2015 they pleaded guilty to one count of vandalism and two counts of criminal trespassing. They each received sentences of nine months' imprisonment and three strokes of the cane.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions generally met international standards. The government operated all prison facilities; there were no private detention facilities.

Administration: The category of the inmate determined the frequency and type of visitors allowed. In general authorities allowed family members and close relatives to visit inmates. Prison authorities must approve visits of nonrelatives. Authorities allowed most inmates two visits a month and up to three visitors in a visit session. They allowed up to four visits per week to detainees awaiting trial. A system exists under which prisoners may file complaints alleging mistreatment or misconduct. When called upon, the Provost Unit, which is located in the prison headquarters, investigates complaints.

Authorities permitted prisoners and detainees to submit complaints to judicial authorities without censorship and to request investigation of credible allegations of inhuman conditions. The Board of Visiting Justices, consisting of justices of the peace appointed by the minister for home affairs, is responsible for the basic welfare of the prisoners and conducts prison inspections. All inmates have access to the visiting justices.

Authorities investigated credible allegations of inhuman conditions and documented the results of such investigations in a publicly accessible manner. The government investigated and monitored prison and detention center conditions. The Institutional Discipline Advisory Committee renders an opinion to the commissioner of prisons on whether corporal punishment was excessive.

Independent Monitoring: The government allowed the Singapore National Committee for UN Women and the Hong Kong Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention to visit the prisons and gave diplomatic representatives regular, frequent consular access to citizens of their countries. Authorities also allowed members of the press to visit the prisons.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The national police, under the direction of the Ministry of Home Affairs, maintains internal security; the armed forces, under the direction of the Ministry of Defense, are responsible for external security.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the police force and the armed forces, and the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau had effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption. There were no reports of impunity involving the security forces during the year.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

In most instances the law requires the issuance of an authorized warrant for arrests, but some laws, such as the ISA, provide for arrest without warrant. Those arrested under a warrant must appear before a magistrate and legally charged within 48 hours. Authorities charged expeditiously and brought to trial the majority of those arrested. A functioning bail system existed. Authorities permitted individuals who faced criminal charges to have counsel, but only after investigations were complete or nearly complete. An accused individual may plead guilty or ask for a trial and seek advice of counsel before deciding what plea to enter. In criminal cases a preliminary hearing must occur no earlier than eight weeks after the initial plea. At this preliminary hearing, the judge determines whether there is sufficient evidence to proceed to trial and sets a court date suitable to the prosecution and to the defense. Any person accused of a capital crime is eligible to be assigned a counsel by the state--free of charge. The government also funded an expanded Criminal Legal Aid Scheme run by the Law Society that covers additional criminal offenses.

Arbitrary Arrest: Some laws, such as the ISA and the Criminal Law (temporary provisions) Act (CLA), have provisions for arrest and detention without warrant. ISA cases are subject to review by the courts to ensure strict compliance with procedural requirements under the act. Authorities invoked the ISA primarily against suspected security threats and employed the CLA mostly against suspected organized crime and drug trafficking. The Misuse of Drugs Act (the drug act) and the Undesirable Publications Act (UPA) also allow 48 hours of detention without a warrant, after which the person must be brought before a magistrate.

Pretrial Detention: The ISA and the CLA permit preventive detention without trial for the protection of public security, safety, or the maintenance of public order. The ISA authorizes the minister for home affairs, with the consent of the cabinet and the president, to order detention without filing charges if the minister determines that a person poses a threat to national security. The initial detention may be for up to two years, which the minister may renew for an unlimited number of additional periods of up to two years each with the president's consent.

As of October there were outstanding orders of detention (ODs) against 17 persons for their involvement in terrorism-related activities.

A religious rehabilitation program designed to wean detained terrorists from extremist ideologies remained in effect, and the government released a number of detainees under the program, subject to restriction orders (ROs).

As of October, 26 persons were on ROs. This number included both released detainees and suspected terrorists who were never arrested. A person subject to an RO must seek official approval for a change of address or occupation, travel overseas, or to participate in any public organization or activity. There is also a category of restriction called suspension direction (SD) that replaces an OD when it is suspended and is similar to an RO. It can also prohibit association with militant or terrorist groups or individuals as well as travel outside the country without the prior written approval of the government. As of October there was one person subject to a SD. Authorities monitored detainees released on ROs and SDs and required that they report to authorities on a regular basis.

The CLA comes up for renewal every five years; the most recent renewal was in 2014. Under the CLA, the minister for home affairs may order preventive detention, with the concurrence of the public prosecutor, for an initial period of one year, and the president may extend detention for additional periods of up to one year at a time. The minister must provide a written statement of the grounds for detention to the Criminal Law Advisory Committee (CLAC) within 28 days of the order. The CLAC then reviews the case at a private hearing. CLAC rules require that authorities notify detainees of the grounds of their detention at least 10 days prior to this hearing, during which detainees may represent themselves or be represented by a lawyer. After the hearing the committee makes a written recommendation to the president, who may cancel, confirm, or amend the detention order. The government used the CLA almost exclusively in cases involving narcotics, loan sharks, or criminal organizations and not for political purposes.

Persons who allege mistreatment while in detention may bring criminal charges against the government officials alleged to have committed the act; there were no reports of such cases during the year.

Both the ISA and the CLA allow for modified forms of detention such as curfews, residence limitations, requirements to report regularly to authorities, limitations on travel, and, in the case of the ISA, restrictions on political activities and association.

The drug act permits detention without trial in an approved institution for the purpose of the treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts. Under the act, if a suspected drug abuser tests positive for an illegal drug, the director of the Central Narcotics Bureau may commit the person to a drug rehabilitation center for a six-month period, which a review committee of the institution may extend for a

maximum of three years. Under the Intoxicating Substances Act, the bureau director may order treatment for up to six months of a person determined by blood test or medical examination to be an abuser of inhalant drugs.

Detainee's Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: The ISA provides detainees the right to be informed of the grounds for their detention and the right to have legal counsel; however, they have no right to challenge the substantive basis for their detention through the courts. The ISA specifically excludes recourse to the normal judicial system for review of a detention order made under its authority. Instead, detainees may make representations to an advisory board, headed by a Supreme Court justice, which reviews each detainee's case annually and must make a recommendation to the president within three months of the initial detention. The president may concur with the advisory board's recommendation to release a detainee prior to the expiration of the detention order, but the president is not obligated to do so.

Persons detained under the CLA have recourse to the courts via an application for a writ of habeas corpus. Persons detained without trial under the CLA are entitled to counsel, but they may challenge the substantive basis for their detention only to the CLAC. In 2013 Dan Tan, the suspected mastermind behind a global football match-fixing syndicate, and several accomplices were detained under the CLA in the interest of public safety. Tan filed a court order in 2014 requesting judicial review of his detention, but the application was rejected by the High Court, and the detention order was extended another year. In 2015 the Court of Appeal freed Dan Tan from prison after it ruled that his detention was unlawful. Subsequently, the court reviewed the evidence against Tan's accomplices and then revoked their detention orders and placed them on police supervision orders.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence. Nevertheless, constitutionally authorized laws limiting judicial review continued to permit restrictions on individuals' constitutional rights. The president consults with the prime minister but has discretion in appointing the chief justice and judges to the Supreme Court. The president appoints subordinate court judges on the recommendation of the chief justice. The Legal Service Commission, chaired by the chief justice, determines the term of appointment. Under the ISA and the CLA, the president and the minister for home affairs can exercise executive discretion, which explicitly (in the case of the ISA) or implicitly (in the case of the CLA) excludes

normal judicial review. These laws empower the government to limit, on vaguely defined national security grounds, the scope of certain fundamental liberties that otherwise are provided for in the constitution.

Some commentators and representatives of international non-governmental organizations (NGO) noted that the Legal Service Commission's authority to rotate subordinate court judges and magistrates and the ability of both the commission and the chief justice to extend, at their discretion, the tenure of Supreme Court judges beyond the age of 65 could undermine the independence of the judiciary.

Trial Procedures

The law provides all defendants with the right to a fair trial, and independent observers viewed the judiciary as generally impartial and independent, except in a small number of cases involving direct challenges to the government or the ruling party. The judicial system generally provided citizens with an efficient judicial process.

In most circumstances the criminal procedure code provides that a charge against a defendant must be read and explained to him as soon as the prosecutor or magistrate composes it. Trials are public and heard by a judge; there are no jury trials. Defendants have the right to be present at their trials and to have representation by an attorney; the Law Society administered a legal aid plan for persons facing criminal charges who could not afford an attorney. Under the state-administered Legal Assistance Scheme for Capital Offenses, anyone facing a capital charge is eligible for state-assigned counsel; no eligibility criterion is imposed. The criminal procedure code provides for an automatic appeal process for all death sentence cases. Authorities may offer nonviolent offenders the option of probation or paying a fine in lieu of incarceration.

Defendants also have the right to question prosecution witnesses, provide witnesses and evidence on their own behalf, and review government-held evidence relevant to their cases. Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence and the right of appeal in most cases. Defense lawyers believed they generally had sufficient time and facilities to prepare an adequate defense. Despite the general presumption of innocence, the drug act stipulates that a person who the prosecution proves possessed, had custody of, or controlled illegal narcotics shall be assumed to be aware of the substance and places the burden on the defendant to prove otherwise, although not beyond a reasonable doubt. The same law also stipulates that if the amount of the narcotic is above set limits, it is the defendant's burden to

prove he or she did not have the drug for the purpose of trafficking. Convictions for narcotics trafficking offenses carry lengthy jail sentences or the death penalty, depending on the type and amount of the illegal substance. Defendants have 14 days from the date of conviction to enter an appeal. Legislative amendments to abolish the mandatory imposition of the death penalty under certain circumstances of homicide and drug trafficking took effect in 2013. Under the new legal regime, those facing the death penalty have the opportunity to ask for resentencing under certain circumstances, and judges have discretion to impose life imprisonment instead.

Persons detained under the ISA or CLA are not entitled to a public trial. Proceedings of the advisory board under the ISA and CLA are not public.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

There is no differentiation between civil and criminal judicial procedures. The subordinate courts handled the majority of civil cases. Access to the courts is open, and citizens and residents have the right to sue for infringement of human rights. Individuals and organizations may not appeal adverse domestic decisions to regional human rights bodies.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution does not address privacy rights; remedies for infringement of some aspects of privacy rights are available under statutory or common law. The government generally respected the privacy of homes and families. Normally police must have a warrant issued by a court to conduct a search, but they may search a person, home, or property without a warrant if they decide that such a search is necessary to preserve evidence or under the discretionary powers of the ISA, CLA, drug act, or UPA.

Law enforcement agencies, including the Internal Security Department and the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau, had extensive networks for gathering information and conducting surveillance and highly sophisticated capabilities to monitor telephone, e-mail, text messaging, or other digital communications

intended to remain private. No court warrants are required for such operations. Most residents believed that authorities routinely monitored telephone conversations and the use of the internet. Most residents also believed that authorities routinely conducted surveillance of some opposition politicians and other government critics.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

Freedom of Speech and Expression: The constitution provides for freedom of speech and freedom of expression but imposes official restrictions on these rights, and the government significantly restricted freedom of speech and of the press involving criticism of the government and statements that the government contended would undermine social or religious harmony. Government intimidation and pressure to conform resulted in self-censorship among many journalists. Nevertheless, there was an increase in open debate regarding government policies, and government leaders used social media to engage citizens on various issues and concerns. In the campaign leading to the 2015 general election, no opposition parties reported facing restrictions in holding campaign rallies.

In August Parliament passed the Administration of Justice (Protection) Bill, which identifies actions that constitute contempt of court to include disobeying court orders (unless it is due to an “honest” and “reasonable” failure to understand the obligations under the order), publishing material that prejudges pending proceedings or interferes with proceedings in progress, and making allegations of bias against judges. Several prominent lawyers and public figures openly questioned if the law excessively restricts public discussion of court proceedings.

In 2000 the government established Speakers’ Corner as the only outdoor venue where citizens could give public speeches without a Public Entertainment License. Originally, only Singapore citizens were permitted to use the location and were required to obtain a police permit. Over time the rules eased, although restrictions remained. Today, Speakers’ Corner may be used for exhibitions, performances, and demonstrations, and Singapore citizens do not need a police permit to organize or participate in these events. Permanent residents may participate in events but must obtain a police permit in order to speak at or organize an event. Foreigners and foreign entities, however, must obtain a police permit in order to speak at, participate in, or organize events at the Speakers’ Corner. In October the Ministry

of Home Affairs clarified the definitions of “public speaking” and “organizing” at Speakers’ Corner. Public speaking includes speaking through remote means, such as teleconferencing or prerecorded messages. Organizing an event includes sponsoring, publicly promoting the event, or organizing its members or employees to participate in the event. All event organizers must preregister online with the National Parks Board and must provide the topic of their event; regulations state that the event should not be religious in nature or cause feelings of enmity, ill will, or hostility between different racial or religious groups. The commissioner of parks and recreation reserves the right to cancel or disallow any event or activity that he or she believes may endanger or cause discomfort or inconvenience to other park users and/or the general public.

Citizens need a permit to speak at indoor public gatherings outside the hearing or view of nonparticipants only if the topic refers to race or religion. Indoor, private events are not subject to the same restrictions. Organizers of private events, however, must be vigilant in ensuring uninvited guests do not find a way inside, or they could be cited for noncompliance and, inadvertently, violate the rules regarding public gatherings.

Press and Media Freedoms: Under the ISA the government may restrict or place conditions on publications that incite violence, counsel disobedience to the law, have the potential to arouse tensions in the country’s diverse population, or threaten national interests, national security, or public order. The government has not invoked the ISA against political opponents since 1998.

Government leaders urged that news media support the goals of the elected leadership and help maintain social and religious harmony. In addition to enforcing strict defamation and press laws, the government’s demonstrated willingness to respond vigorously to what it considered personal attacks on officials led journalists and editors to moderate or limit what was published. In some instances the government sued journalists or online bloggers for defamation or for stories that authorities believed undermined social and religious harmony.

The government strongly influenced both the print and electronic media. Two companies, Singapore Press Holdings Limited (SPH) and MediaCorp, owned all general circulation newspapers in the four official languages of English, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil. SPH is a private holding company with close ties to the government; the government must approve (and can remove) the holders of SPH management shares, who have the power to appoint or dismiss all directors or staff. The government investment company Temasek Holdings wholly owned

MediaCorp. As a result, while newspapers printed a large and diverse selection of articles from domestic and foreign sources, their editorials, coverage of domestic events, and reporting of sensitive foreign relations topics usually closely reflected official government policies and the opinions of government leaders.

Columnists' opinions and letters to the editor expressed a moderate range of opinions on public issues, some critical of government policies.

Government-linked companies and organizations operated all domestic broadcast television channels and almost all radio stations. Only one radio station, the BBC World Service, was completely independent of the government. Residents could receive some Malaysian and Indonesian television and radio programming, but with few exceptions authorities prohibited satellite dishes. Cable subscribers had access to numerous foreign television shows and a wide array of international news channels and many entertainment channels. The government did not censor international news channels but did censor entertainment programs to remove or edit coarse language, representations of intimate gay and lesbian relationships, and explicit sexual content. In February a foreign leader's remarks on *The Ellen Show* regarding gay rights were edited and not broadcasted in the country. The segment was deemed "unsuitable for family audiences."

Censorship or Content Restrictions: In September the Media Development Authority (MDA) and the Info-communications Development Authority merged to form a new agency, the Info-communications Media Development Authority (IMDA). The MDA is a statutory board under the Ministry of Communications and Information that continues the former MDA's role to regulate broadcast, print, and other media, including movies, video materials, computer games, and music. Banned publications consisted primarily of sexually oriented materials but also included some religious and political publications. The IMDA develops censorship standards including age-appropriate classification of media content with the help of various citizen advisory panels. The ISA, UPA, and Films Act allow the banning, seizure, censorship, or restriction of written, visual, or musical materials if authorities determine that such materials threaten the stability of the state, contravene moral norms, are pornographic, show excessive or gratuitous sex and violence, glamorize or promote drug use, or incite racial, religious, or linguistic animosities. The IMDA has the power to sanction broadcasters for transmitting what it believed to be inappropriate content. All content shown between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. must be suitable for viewers of all ages.

In June the producers of the musical *Les Miserables* removed a comical kiss between two men from all performances in order to retain a “General” rating (suitable for all ages). The MDA stated that such a scene would fall under an “Advisory” rating (mature content, parental guidance is advised).

In October the producers of the musical *RENT* decided to cut the same-sex kisses from several performances after the IMDA gave the show a rating of R18 (suitable for audiences age 18 and above), which required enforceable age restrictions. Without the same-sex kisses, the performances were rated as suitable for audiences age 16 and above.

Under the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act, the government may limit the circulation of foreign publications it determines interfere with domestic politics. The act requires foreign publications with circulation of 300 or more copies per issue that report on politics and current events in Southeast Asia to register, post a bond of S\$200,000 (\$144,000), and name a person in the country to accept legal service. The requirements for offshore newspapers applied to nine foreign newspapers but exempted three others.

The government may “gazette” (limit) the circulation of publications. The government also may ban the circulation of domestic and foreign publications under provisions of the ISA and UPA. The Broadcasting Act empowers the minister for communications and information to gazette or place formal restrictions on any foreign broadcaster deemed to be engaging in domestic politics. The government can require a gazetted broadcaster to obtain express permission from the minister to continue broadcasting in the country. The government may impose restrictions on the number of households receiving a broadcaster’s programming and may fine a broadcaster up to S\$100,000 (\$72,000) for failing to comply.

Libel Laws/Slander: Critics charged that government leaders used defamation lawsuits or threats of such actions to discourage public criticism, coerce the press, and intimidate opposition politicians. Conviction on criminal defamation charges may result in a prison sentence of up to two years, a fine, or both.

Playing of musical instruments is banned during processions, including religious foot processions, to “deter public disorder which may be caused by rivalries between groups and to minimize the impact of the procession along the procession route.” During the annual Hindu Thaipusam procession in 2015, after failing to prevent some participants from playing drums, which contravened permit conditions, event organizers requested police support. Police arrested three men

for vulgar speech and injury of police officers. The arrests prompted online comments, with some calling the ban on musical instruments unjustified and others alleging that the excessive police reaction provoked the situation. The AGC released a media statement to warn the public against making comments that could be considered contempt of court for interfering with the administration of justice. Local media ran stories with headlines such as “AGC warns against public or online comments on Thaipusam incident.” The online discussions stopped in short order. Following feedback from the Hindu Endowment Board on the importance of religious music to devotees participating in Thaipusam, the government relaxed this rule to allow more music. In January, after a 42-year absence, musical instruments were permitted at Thaipusam.

Internet Freedom

In August the government committed to promote an open, interoperable, reliable, and secure global Internet and affirmed that the same rights that persons have offline must be protected online. Although online end users generally had unrestricted access to the internet, the government subjected all internet content to similar rules and standards as traditional media, as defined under the IMDA’s Internet Code of Practice. Individuals and groups could engage in the expression of views via the internet, including by e-mail. Internet service providers (ISPs) are required to ensure that content complies with the code. The IMDA also regulates internet material by licensing the ISPs through which local users are required to route their internet connections. The law permits government monitoring of internet use, and the government closely monitored internet activities, such as social media posts, blogs, and podcasts. The IMDA was empowered to direct service providers to block access to websites that, in the government’s view, undermined public security, national defense, racial and religious harmony, or public morals. Political and religious websites must register with the IMDA. Although a government-appointed review panel recommended that the government cease banning 100 specific websites for being pornographic, inciting racial and religious intolerance, or promoting terrorism and extremism, the ban remained in effect. In 2016, 88 percent of households and 81 percent of individuals had internet access.

The Online News Licensing Scheme (ONLS) requires certain internet news sites to obtain a license. This requirement applies to sites that publish on average at least one article per week over a two-month period that relates to issues in the country and receives at least 50,000 monthly site visits over a two-month period from the unique addresses of Singapore-based internet providers. The license requires these

sites to submit a bond of S\$50,000 (\$36,000) and to adhere to additional requirements to remove prohibited content within 24 hours of notification from the IMDA. Many citizens viewed this regulation as a way to censor online critics of the government. The IMDA stated there was need to regulate commercial news sites and promote conformity with other forms of media such as print and television. The minister of communications and information stated that the intent of the regulation was not to target individual bloggers or blogs. As of November, 11 news sites had received notification from IMDA to move to the ONLS to obtain licenses and acceded to the request. News sites that cover political issues are required to register under the Broadcasting Act Class License to ensure that registrants do not receive foreign funding. Most websites registered upon request by the IMDA, with the exception of one that chose to shut down.

In September 17-year-old blogger Amos Yee received a sentence of six weeks in jail after he pled guilty to charges of obscenity and for “wounding religious feelings” by posting comments on the internet criticizing Christianity and Islam. In 2015 Yee was found guilty after posting a YouTube video criticizing the late prime minister Lee Kuan Yew and sentenced to four weeks in jail. During the 2015 trial, the AGC issued a take-down notice to local sociopolitical website *The Online Citizen* for publishing a letter from Yee’s lawyer that questioned the AGC’s process in submitting evidence as well as the suitability of a reformatory training sentence for Yee on the grounds that the letter was in contempt of court.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There was limited autonomy of all public institutions of higher education and political research. Although faculty members were not technically government employees, they were subject to potential government influence. Academics spoke, published widely, and engaged in debate on social and political problems, although public comment outside the classroom or in academic publications that ventured into prohibited areas--such as criticism of political leaders, sensitive social and economic policies, or comments that could disturb ethnic or religious harmony or appeared to advocate partisan political views--could result in sanctions. Publications by local academics and members of research institutions rarely deviated substantially from government views.

The law authorizes the minister of communications and information to ban any film, whether political or not, that in his opinion is “contrary to the public interest.” The law does not apply to any film sponsored by the government and allows the minister to exempt any film from the act.

Certain films barred from general release may be allowed limited showings, either censored or uncensored. Films, including banned films, were available through YouTube and other websites.

In 2014 the then MDA banned the film *To Singapore, With Love*, on the grounds that it undermined national security and stated that “the individuals in the film have given distorted and untruthful accounts of how they came to leave Singapore and remain outside Singapore.” The film featured interviews with political activists who had fled the country in the 1960s and 70s.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The constitution provides citizens the right to peaceful assembly but permits Parliament to impose restrictions “it considers necessary or expedient” in the interest of security, public order, or morality, and the government restricted this right. Public assemblies, including political meetings and rallies, require police permission. By law a public assembly may include events staged by a single person. Citizens do not need permits for indoor speaking events, unless they touch on “sensitive topics” such as race or religion, or for qualifying events held at Speakers’ Corner. Police also have the authority to order a person to “move on” from a certain area and not return to the designated spot for 24 hours.

In June activist and blogger Han Hui Hui received a fine for organizing a rally without prior approval to protest the government’s management of the national retirement fund. The judge stated the evidence proved Han rallied her Facebook readers to go to the event to protest, but that she did not have the approval of authorities to organize a demonstration or had she applied for one.

The government closely monitored political gatherings regardless of the number of persons present.

Spontaneous public gatherings or demonstrations were virtually unknown.

Freedom of Association

Most associations, societies, clubs, religious groups, and other organizations with more than 10 members are required to register with the government under the

Societies Act. The government can deny registration to groups that it believed had been formed for unlawful purposes or for purposes prejudicial to public peace, welfare, or public order. One application, of 236 submitted from January to October, was denied (155 were approved). The government has absolute discretion in applying criteria to register or dissolve societies.

The government prohibits organized political activities except by groups registered as political parties or political associations. The latter may not receive foreign donations but can receive funds from citizens and locally controlled entities. The PAP was able to use nonpolitical organizations, such as residential committees and neighborhood groups, for political purposes far more extensively than was the case for opposition parties. Due to laws regulating the formation of publicly active organizations, there were few NGOs apart from nonpolitical organizations, such as religious groups, ethnically oriented organizations, environmental groups, and providers of welfare services.

In June, three days after the annual LGBTI “Freedom to Love” rally organized by the advocacy group Pink Dot, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a press statement saying “foreign entities should not interfere in our domestic issues, especially political issues or controversial social issues with political overtones,” to include LGBTI issues. The announcement sparked much commentary online and in the press, as well as criticism from human rights groups.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/.

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The constitution and the law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, although it limited them in certain circumstances. The government cooperated with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to asylum seekers and other persons of concern.

In-country Movement: The ISA permits authorities to restrict a person’s movement, and they did so in the case of some former ISA detainees. According

to government sources, 21 suspected terrorists were subject to such restrictions in 2014.

Foreign Travel: The government may refuse to issue a passport, primarily on security grounds.

Men are required to undertake 24 months of uniformed national service upon reaching age 18. They also are required to participate in reserve training up to age 40 (for enlisted men) or 50 (for officers). Male citizens and permanent residents with national service reserve obligations are required to advise the Ministry of Defense of plans to travel abroad. Men and boys age 13 years and older who have not completed national service obligations are required to obtain exit permits for international travel if they intend to be away for three months or more. To obtain the required permit, a prospective traveler must in certain cases post a bond equal to S\$75,000 (\$54,000) or 50 percent of the combined gross annual income of both parents for the preceding year, whichever is greater. The bond requirement applies to male travelers that are 16 and one-half years of age and older for travel exceeding three months and to male travelers who are 13 to 16 and one-half years of age for travel lasting two or more years.

Emigration and Repatriation: The law allows for loss of citizenship by citizens who reside outside the country for more than 10 consecutive years; however, there were no known instances of the law being applied.

Former members of the Communist Party of Malaya residing outside the country may not repatriate unless they renounce communism, sever all links with the party, and agree to be interviewed by the Internal Security Department about their past activities. Some former party cadres accepted these conditions and returned in the past, but observers estimated that approximately 30 alleged party members had not.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, although the government may, on compassionate grounds and in cooperation with organizations such as UNHCR, provide assistance to refugees on a case-by-case basis.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. Voting by secret ballot is compulsory, and 93.7 percent of eligible voters voted in the September 2015 general election. In five decades of continuous rule, the PAP has employed a variety of policies that effectively limited the ability of the opposition to mount a serious challenge to its hold on power. In recent years, however, the opposition won additional seats.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In May a by-election was held in the Bukit Batok constituency due to the resignation of the incumbent member of Parliament (MP) in March. The ruling party candidate won with 61.2 percent of the votes. The 2015 parliamentary general election was free, fair, and open to a viable opposition. There were eight opposition parties, and all seats were contested for the first time since independence. The ruling party won 69.9 percent of the popular vote, capturing 83 of 89 seats in Parliament. The opposition Worker's Party was re-elected to the six seats it had won in the 2011 general election. The general elections operate under the first-past-the-post system. A constitutional provision assures at least nine opposition members in Parliament; there were three nonconstituency members from the Worker's Party in the 13th Parliament that was seated in March, chosen from the highest-finishing runners-up in the 2015 general election.

The law provides for the popular election of the president to a six-year term from among candidates approved by a constitutionally prescribed committee selected by the government. In 2011 Tony Tan became president in the first contested presidential election since 1993. In the four-way race, Tan won with 35.2 percent of the vote.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The opposition continued to criticize what it described as PAP abuse of its incumbency to restrict opposition parties. The PAP maintained its political dominance in part by circumscribing political discourse and action.

The PAP had an extensive grassroots system and a carefully selected, highly disciplined membership. The establishment of government-organized and predominantly publicly funded Community Development Councils further strengthened the PAP's position. The councils promoted community development and cohesion and provided welfare as well as other assistance services.

The PAP controlled key positions in and out of government, influenced the press, and benefited from weak opposition parties. The PAP's methods were fully consistent with the law and the normal prerogatives of a parliamentary government, but the overall effect was to perpetuate PAP power. The constitutional requirement that MPs resign if expelled from their party helped ensure backbencher discipline.

Although political parties were legally free to organize, authorities imposed strict regulations on their constitutions, fundraising, and accountability, including a ban on receiving foreign donations. There were 29 registered political parties, nine of which were active. In addition government influence extended in varying degrees to academic, community service, and other NGOs.

Participation of Women and Minorities: No laws limit the participation of women and members of minorities in the political process, and women and minorities did participate. There is no legal bar to the participation of women in political life.

There are no restrictions in law or practice against voting or political participation by minorities; they actively participated and were well represented throughout the government, except in some sensitive national security positions. Of the 89 MPs in the 13th Parliament, 21 were women, one of which was a full Cabinet member. Malays, who made up approximately 13 percent of the general population, held 12 out of 87 elected parliamentary seats. Indians, who made up approximately 9 percent of the general population, held 10 elected seats. The cabinet consists of four ethnic Indian ministers and two ethnic Malay ministers. Of the 30 Justices, Judges of Appeal, and Judicial Commissioners of the Supreme Court, four were Indians; there were no Malays on the Supreme Court. None of the 24 civil service permanent secretaries were ethnically Indian or Malay.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented these laws effectively.

Corruption: No cases of official corruption cases were reported during the year.

Financial Disclosure: The law requires civil servants to declare their investments, properties, and indebtedness to their respective permanent secretaries. Under the code of conduct for ministers, ministers make financial disclosures to the prime

minister. The salaries of senior officials were public information, and political parties are required to report donations.

Public Access to Information: No laws specifically provide for public access to government information. There were calls from various segments in society, including civil society organizations and academics, for the public sector to be more forthcoming with information and access.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A variety of domestic human rights groups generally operated without government restriction and these organizations investigated and published their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were somewhat cooperative and responsive to their views. NGOs were subject to registration under the Societies Act or the Companies Act.

Some international human rights NGOs criticized the government's policies in areas such as capital punishment, migrant workers' rights, freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and protection of the rights of LGBTI persons. They charged that the government generally ignored such criticisms or published rebuttals.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The government enforced the law against rape, which provides for imprisonment of up to 20 years and the possibility of caning for offenders. By law only a man can commit rape. A man cannot legally be a victim of rape, but he may be the victim of unlawful sexual penetration, which carries the same penalties as rape. Spousal rape is generally not a crime, but husbands who force their wives to have intercourse can be prosecuted for other offenses, such as assault. Spousal rape is a criminal offense when the couple is separated, subject to an interim divorce order that has not become final, or subject to a written separation agreement, as well as when a court has issued a protection order against the husband. From January to October, 16 persons were charged with rape; five of the 16 were statutory rape cases involving girls under the age of 14. Agencies, including the Ministry of Education and the police, carried out programs to raise awareness of sexual offenses.

The law criminalizes domestic violence and intentional harassment. Victims of domestic violence can obtain court orders restraining the respondent from using violence against them and barring the spouse from the home until the court is satisfied that the spouse has ceased aggressive behavior. The law prescribes mandatory caning and a minimum imprisonment of two years for conviction on any charge of “outraging modesty” that caused the victim to fear death or injury. From January to October, there were 214 cases of outrage of modesty. The press gave prominent coverage to instances of abuse or violence against women. Several voluntary welfare organizations assisted abused women. From January to October, there were 2,357 applications of personal protection orders, 51 percent of which were filed by wives for protection from their husbands.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Type I (as classified by the World Health Organization) female genital mutilation/cutting was practiced among a small portion of the Muslim population. Normally involving nicking the prepuce but in some cases the partial or total removal of the clitoris, these procedures were performed by female doctors at Muslim clinics, usually on female infants or prepubescent girls. There is no legislation banning the practice.

Sexual Harassment: By law a person who uses threatening, abusive, or insulting words or behavior can incur a fine of up to S\$5,000 (\$2,875). The law criminalizes harassment and cites examples that include harassment both within and outside the workplace, cyberbullying, and bullying of children. It also provides a range of self-help measures, civil remedies, and enhanced criminal sanctions to protect against harassment. Additionally it makes stalking an offense punishable with a fine of up to S\$5,000 (\$2,875), imprisonment for up to 12 months, or both.

According to police statistics, lewd acts decreased by 6.2 percent, from 657 cases in the first half of 2014 to 616 cases in the same period in 2015. There were fewer reports of such acts on trains and in open areas, but reports of such acts on public buses increased. The Ministry of Manpower, the National Trades Union Council, and the Employers Federation jointly operated a venue for public feedback and advice on fair employment practices.

Reproductive Rights: Couples and individuals have the right to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children; manage their reproductive health; and have access to the information and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, and violence.

Discrimination: Women enjoy the same legal rights as men, including civil liberties, employment, commercial activity, and education. In 2013 women made up 51.6 percent of university graduates and 42.5 percent of professionals, managers, executives, and technicians. Women were well represented in many professions. As of June 2014, 41.4 percent of residents employed as professionals were women. No laws mandate nondiscrimination in hiring practice on the basis of gender, prohibit employers from asking questions about a prospective employee's family status during a job interview, provide for flexible or part-time work schedules for employees with minor children, or establish public provision of childcare.

According to a National University of Singapore Business School report published in 2013 on the diversity of executive boards, women held 8.3 percent of directorships and 21.2 percent of senior management positions (excluding executive directors) in companies listed on the stock exchange. They were overrepresented in low-wage jobs such as clerks and secretaries.

For the most part, Muslim marriage falls under the Administration of the Muslim Law Act, which empowers the Syariah Court and the Registry of Muslim Marriages to oversee such matters. The law allows Muslim men to practice polygyny, although the Registry of Muslim Marriages, which solicits the views of an existing wife or wives and reviews the financial capability of the husband, may refuse husbands' requests to take additional spouses. In the first 10 months of the year, there were 30 applications for polygynous marriage; the registry approved 12. Polygynous marriages constituted 0.3 percent of Muslim marriages.

Both men and women have the right to initiate divorce proceedings, and both may apply to the Syariah Court for a waiver of court fees if they cannot afford to pay. Women faced significant difficulties, including a lack of financial resources to obtain legal counsel, which prevented some of them from pursuing such proceedings. Men do not have the right to seek alimony from their wives in cases of divorce or separation.

Children

Birth Registration: The law requires that all births be registered within 14 days of occurrence. Citizenship derives from one's parents.

Child Abuse: The Children and Young Persons Act criminalizes mistreatment of children, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. The government

enforced the law against child abuse and provided support services for child-abuse victims.

Early and Forced Marriage: The law characterizes unmarried persons under age 21 as minors and persons under 14 as children. Individuals under age 21 wishing to marry must obtain parental consent. In addition to obtaining parental consent, individuals under age 18 require a special license from the Ministry of Social and Family Development. Couples in which one person is under age 18, or where both are between ages 18 and 21, are required to attend a marriage preparation program before they can be issued a marriage license.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): See information under women above.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: Some child sex trafficking occurred. The law criminalizes human trafficking, including child sex trafficking. From January to October, there were eight cases of sex trafficking involving victims under age 18; three cases resulted in a conviction with a 75-month imprisonment and a fine of S\$30,000 (\$20,800). The remaining cases were under investigation at year's end.

The age of consent for noncommercial sex is 16. Sexual intercourse with a person under age 16 is punishable by up to 10 years in prison, a fine, or both, and punishable by up to 20 years in prison and a fine or caning if the victim is 14 or younger. Most individuals convicted of pedophilia received several weeks to several months in jail. Authorities may detain (but do not prosecute) persons under age 18 whom they believe to be engaged in prostitution. They prosecute those who organize or profit from prostitution, bring women or girls to the country for prostitution, or coerce or deceive women or girls into prostitution. The law is ambiguous regarding employment of persons ages 16 to 18 in the production of pornography.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html.

Anti-Semitism

There were approximately 800 to 1,000 members of the Jewish community. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

Persons with Disabilities

The Ministry of Social and Family Development is responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. There is no comprehensive legislation addressing equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in education or employment. In April the ministry announced the development of its third enabling master plan, a five-year policy plan for the programs and services in the disability sector. The new plan focuses on greater inclusiveness for persons with disabilities and more support for caregivers.

During the 2015 presidential elections, voters with visual disabilities could cast their vote independently with stencils, and electoral law allows voters who are unable to vote in the manner described by law to receive assistance from election officials to mark and cast their ballots. During the year the Disabled People's Association published a report, "Achieving Inclusion in the Electoral Process," that included several recommendations to the government for breaking down the barriers to electoral participation for persons with disabilities, including voting assistance by a person of one's choosing.

The government maintained a comprehensive code on barrier-free accessibility, established standards for facilities for persons with physical disabilities in all new buildings, and mandated the progressive upgrading of older structures. SG Enable, established by the Ministry of Social and Family Development, provided job training and placement program for persons with disabilities. A tax deduction of up to S\$100,000 (\$72,000) was available to employers to defray approved expenditures incurred in modifying buildings to accommodate employees with disabilities. The government also provided a tax deduction of up to S\$7,500 (\$5,400) for families caring for a sibling, spouse, or child with a disability and up to S\$14,000 (\$10,000) for a parent or grandparent. The country allows guide dogs for the blind (but not other service animals) in public places, on buses, and on trains. Although the laws do not cover taxis, the government worked with the taxi industry to develop guidelines. Public trains were 100 percent wheelchair accessible, and approximately 85 percent of bus routes were wheelchair accessible.

Informal provisions permitted university matriculation for those with visual, hearing, or physical disabilities. Approximately 18,500 children with disabilities with mild special education needs attended mainstream schools in 2015. There were 20 special education schools, which enrolled 5,516 students in 2015. All primary and secondary schools were equipped with basic accessibility facilities, such as accessible toilets and first-level wheelchair ramps. Approximately 30 percent of all primary and 20 percent of secondary schools were equipped with facilities to address access for persons with disabilities. All primary schools were resourced with at least one specialist to support students with mild special education needs, and 81 secondary schools were resourced with an Allied Educator to support students with mild special needs. As of the end of 2015, 10 percent of teachers in all primary school and 20 percent of teachers in all secondary school were trained in special education.

The government provided funds for two distinct types of early education programs for children with disabilities. The Early Intervention Program for Infants and Children provided educational and therapy services for children up to age six with moderate to severe needs. As of October 2015, 2,600 children participated. The government also sponsored a Development Support Program to provide learning support and therapy services in mainstream schools for children up to age six with mild developmental disabilities. Approximately 1,200 children received services from this support program in 2015.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Ethnic Malays constituted approximately 13 percent of the population. The constitution acknowledges them as the indigenous people of the country and charges the government to support and promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social, cultural, and language interests. Although the government took steps to encourage greater educational achievement among Malay students and upgrading of skills among Malay workers, ethnic Malays have not reached the educational or socioeconomic levels achieved by the ethnic Chinese majority, the ethnic Indian minority, or the Eurasian community. Malays remained underrepresented at senior corporate levels and, some asserted, in certain sectors of the government and the military. This reflected their historically lower educational and economic levels, but some argued it also was a result of employment discrimination.

The Presidential Council on Minority Rights examined all pending bills to ensure that they were not disadvantageous to a particular group. It also reported to the government on matters that affected any racial or religious community.

Government policy designed to facilitate interethnic harmony and prevent the formation of racial enclaves enforced ethnic ratios, applicable for all ethnic groups, for all forms of public housing.

Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Section 377a of the penal code criminalizes and punishes male-to-male sexual relations as follows: “Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or abets the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years.” The law does not criminalize female-to-female sexual relations. After the failure of a 2007 attempt to repeal this provision, Prime Minister Lee stated that authorities would not actively enforce the statute. In 2014 the Court of Appeals rejected a constitutional challenge, finding that 377a did not contravene the equal protection clause.

No laws explicitly provide for the protection of the LGBTI community from discrimination based on sexual orientation. Moreover, since single persons are prevented from purchasing government housing reserved for married couples until age 35, LGBTI persons, who are unable to wed, were more susceptible to these restrictions.

In two surveys of LGBTI citizens conducted in the last four years--the Homophobia and Transphobia Survey 2012 and the National LGBTI Census 2013--the majority of LGBTI persons reported having experienced abuse or bullying on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity at some point while growing up.

Recruitment procedures do not bar members of the LGBTI community from military service but classify LGBTI military personnel by sexual orientation and evaluate them on a scale of “effeminacy.” LGBTI citizens may become government workers but must declare their sexual orientation on job applications. Changing of gender on official documents is allowed only through sex reassignments. Media censorship perpetuated negative stereotypes of LGBTI individuals by restricting portrayals of LGBTI life. The IMDA continued to censor

films and television shows with LGBTI themes. According to the IMDA website, authorities allow the broadcast of LGBTI themes on television “as long as the presentation does not justify, promote, or glamorize such a lifestyle” (see section 2.a.).

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

Some individuals with HIV/AIDS claimed that they were socially marginalized and faced employment discrimination if they revealed their HIV/AIDS status. The government discouraged discrimination, supported initiatives that countered misperceptions about HIV/AIDS, and publicly praised employers that welcomed workers with HIV/AIDS. In April 2015 the government lifted its 20-year ban on HIV-positive visitors, although HIV-positive individuals are still barred from work permits or immigrant visas.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of most workers to form and join trade unions. Workers have the legal right to strike and to bargain collectively. There is no law prohibiting antiunion discrimination, and no specific laws prohibit retaliation against strikers.

By law Parliament may impose restrictions on the right of association based on security, public order, or morality grounds. The Ministry of Manpower also has broad powers to refuse to register a union or to cancel a union’s registration. The Societies Act and labor and education laws and regulations restrict the right of association by requiring any group of 10 or more persons to register with the government. The Trade Unions Act restricts the right of uniformed personnel and government employees to organize, although the president may grant exemptions. The Amalgamated Union of Public Employees and 15 other public-sector unions received exemptions and may represent all public-sector employees except the most senior civil servants. Foreigners and those with criminal convictions generally may not hold union office or become employees of unions, but the ministry may grant exemptions.

The law requires more than 50 percent of affected unionized workers to vote in favor of a strike by secret ballot, as opposed to 51 percent of those participating in the vote. Workers in “essential services” are required to give 14 days’ notice to an

employer before striking, and there is a prohibition on strikes by workers in the water, gas, and electricity sectors.

Most labor disagreements were resolved through conciliation by the Ministry of Manpower. If conciliation failed, the disputing parties usually submitted their case to the tripartite Industrial Arbitration Court, composed of employee and management representatives and chaired by a judge. The court is available only to employees who are members of a trade union and where the dispute relates to the terms of the employment contract or collective agreements. In some situations the law provides for compulsory arbitration. The court must certify collective agreements before they go into effect. The court may refuse certification at its discretion on the ground of public interest.

Unions were not able to carry out their work without interference from the government or political parties. The Trade Unions Act limits the objectives for which unions can spend their funds, prohibits payments to political parties or the use of funds for political purposes, and restricts the right of trade unions to elect their officers and choose whom they may employ.

Almost all unions were affiliated with the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC), an umbrella organization with a close relationship with the government and the ruling PAP. The NTUC secretary-general was also a cabinet minister. Additionally, four PAP MPs were assistant secretaries-general of the NTUC. NTUC policy prohibited union members who supported opposition parties from holding office in its affiliated unions.

Collective bargaining was a normal part of labor-management relations in all sectors. Because almost all unions were its affiliates, the NTUC had almost exclusive authority to exercise collective bargaining power on behalf of employees. Union members may not reject collective agreements negotiated between their union representatives and an employer. Although transfers and layoffs are excluded from the scope of collective bargaining, employers consulted with unions on both issues, and the Tripartite Panel on Retrenched Workers issued guidelines calling for early notification to unions of layoffs.

Foreign workers made up approximately 15 per cent of union members. Laws, such as the Employment Act and the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act, protect migrant workers. Labor NGOs also filled an important function by providing support for migrant workers, including legal aid and medical care, especially for those in the informal sector.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor. In 2015 the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (PHTA), which strengthens victim protection and the role of law enforcement, went into effect.

The Ministry of Manpower, a participant in the Interagency Trafficking in Persons Taskforce, is responsible for combating labor trafficking and improving working conditions for workers. It generally enforced antitrafficking legislation. PHTA sets out harsh penalties (including up to nine strokes of the cane and 15 years' imprisonment) for those found guilty of trafficking, including forced labor, or abetting such activities. The government developed a mechanism for referral of forced labor, among other trafficking-in-persons activities, to the interagency taskforce, co-chaired by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Manpower in conjunction with civil society and foreign embassies. The Home Affairs Ministry increased its efforts to train law enforcement and immigration officials.

There were reports of practices indicative of forced labor. Migrant workers in low-wage and unskilled sectors such as domestic work, hospitality, and construction were vulnerable to labor exploitation, including the withholding of pay, passports and other identity documents by employers.

There were regular reports of employers arrested for abuse or mistreatment of their foreign domestic workers (FDWs). Upon the FDWs' arrival, there were reports their contracts were substituted, whereby the initial terms agreed upon were significantly changed. The law caps the fees payable by FDWs to employment agencies in the country at one month's salary per year of the employment contract. Observers, however, noted that unscrupulous agencies in sending countries could still charge exorbitant fees. The government took law enforcement action against employers for workplace violations, and it investigated and imposed fines on some unlicensed employment agencies for committing other illegal practices that could facilitate trafficking.

Some observers also noted that the country's employer sponsorship system made legal migrant workers vulnerable to forced labor, because they cannot change employers without the consent of the current employer.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits employment of children under age 13. A child age 13 or older may engage in light work in a nonindustrial undertaking, subject to medical clearance. Exceptions include work in family enterprises; a child 13 or older may work in an industrial undertaking in which only members of his or her family are employed. Ministry of Manpower regulations prohibit night employment of children and restrict industrial work for children between ages 15 and 16 to no more than seven hours a day, including the hours spent in school. Employers must notify the commissioner of labor within 30 days of hiring a child between ages 15 and 16 for industrial work and attach a medical certification of the child's fitness for employment. Children under 15 may not work on commercial vessels, with moving machinery, on live electrical apparatus lacking effective insulation, or in any underground job, and normally they are prohibited from employment in the industrial sector. The law does not clearly identify prohibitions for work by children between ages 16 and 18.

The Ministry of Manpower effectively enforced these laws and regulations. Penalties for employers that violated laws related to child labor were subject to fines and/or imprisonment, depending on the violation. Government officials asserted that child labor was not a significant issue.

The incidence of children in formal employment was low, and there were almost no abuses reported. Some children were subject to commercial sexual exploitation (see section 6).

d. Discrimination with respect to Employment and Occupation

The constitution upholds the principle of equality in employment, but no specific antidiscrimination legislation exists. The Ministry of Manpower's Fair Consideration Framework requires all companies to comply with the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices' (TAFEP) guidelines for employment practices that are open, merit-based, and nondiscriminatory. These guidelines call for eliminating language referring to age, race, gender, religion, marital status, family responsibility, and disability in employment advertisements. Employers are required to provide explanations for putting requirements such as specific language skills in the job advertisement. Penalties for violation of

government guidelines are at the discretion of the ministry. There were no similar government guidelines with respect to political opinion, sexual orientation, or HIV-positive status, or other communicable diseases.

Employers usually followed the guidelines. TAFEP, which works with employer organizations, unions, and the government to create awareness and facilitate the adoption of fair employment practices, received complaints on employment discrimination, largely that employers preferred to hire foreigners. TAFEP received complaints against employers for discrimination based on race, language, or religion. The Ministry of Manpower investigated nine employers over such complaints in 2014. Of the nine companies, the ministry restricted the abilities of eight employers to hire foreigners and added one to a watch list.

Employees were in a legal gray zone when facing discrimination in the workplace, and many cases were unreported. In 2014 the gender wage gap was 12.1 percent, and women were underrepresented in managerial and executive positions. Some persons called for the government to implement antidiscrimination laws. The Association for Muslim Professionals called for the formation of a central body to resolve, mediate, and prevent discriminatory practices against minority races and foreign communities. Some ethnic Malays and Indians reported that discrimination limited their employment and promotion opportunities. According to a 2013 Institute of Policy Studies survey, a majority of the Malay and Indian population at some point had felt racially discriminated against when applying for a job or being considered for promotions.

There were reports of discrimination based on sexual orientation/gender identity. LGBTI citizens may become government workers but must declare their sexual orientation on job applications.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The law does not specify a minimum wage, but citizens and permanent residents generally received relatively high wages that provided a decent standard of living for a worker and family. There is no official poverty level. The most recent average household expenditure on basic needs figure calculated by the government was from 2012/13 and set the amount at S\$1,250 (\$900) per month. In 2015, 18.3 percent of residents--comprising citizens and permanent residents--earned less than S\$1,000 (\$720) a month. The government's progressive wage model, designed to raise the productivity and wages of low-wage workers, requires businesses in some sectors such as cleaning and security services to specify a minimum wage of

S\$1,000 (\$720) to obtain a business license. Some argued that this level was lower than the minimum wage in countries with similar living costs.

The Employment Act sets the standard legal workweek at 44 hours and provides for one rest day each week. For employees covered by the Employment Act, the overtime rate is at least 1.5 times the basic hourly rate of pay. The law permits an employee to work up to a limit of 72 hours of overtime in a month. It requires employers to apply for an overtime exception from the Ministry of Manpower for employees to work more than 72 hours of overtime a month. The law requires employers provide either one rest-day each week or compensation for FDWs.

The law establishes a framework for workplaces to comply with occupational safety and health standards, and regular inspections enforced the standards. Officials encouraged workers to report situations that endanger health or safety to the Ministry of Manpower, but the law does not specifically protect the right of workers to remove themselves from a hazardous working environment. The Work Injury Compensation Act, which provides for medical treatment, medical leave, and compensation for permanent disability, excludes FDWs. Under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act, the employer is responsible for the provision of medical treatment to the employees, including FDWs. Employers are also required to purchase personal accident insurance for their FDWs with coverage up to S\$40,000 (\$28,800).

The Employment Act does not cover managers or executives making more than S\$4,500 (\$3,200) monthly, domestic workers, seafarers, or public servants (individuals employed by a Statutory Board or the government). The maximum salary below which the act applies for “nonworkmen” jobs was S\$2,500 (\$1,800), and a basic monthly salary not exceeding S\$4,500 (\$3,200) for persons employed in managerial and executive positions.

The Ministry of Manpower effectively enforced laws and regulations establishing working conditions and comprehensive occupational safety and health (OSH) laws. Approximately 260 workplace safety and health officers worked for the ministry during the year. Penalties for violating OSH regulations range from S\$50,000 to one million Singapore dollars (\$36,000 to \$720,000), which were sufficient to deter violations. The government also enforced requirements for employers to provide one rest day per week or compensation for FDWs, and penalties include a fine of up to S\$10,000 (\$7,200) or 12 months in prison. From January to October 2014, the ministry received 114 salary claims involving these workers.

The ministry implemented enforcement procedures and promoted educational and training programs to reduce the frequency of job-related accidents. There were 20,800 high-risk factories registered with the ministry under the enhanced factory registration scheme. The scheme strengthens the requirements for implementation of risk management and safety- and health-management systems in these higher-risk factories, which included construction worksites, shipyards, metalworking factories, and petrochemical plants. The Labor Relations and Workplaces Division of the Ministry of Manpower provided free advisory and mediation services to foreign workers experiencing problems with employers. The Foreign Manpower Management Division operated a hotline to receive information regarding FDWs' well-being.

Substantial numbers of foreign workers held white-collar jobs. Employers and workers generally negotiated wages annually. The National Wages Council, composed of labor, management, and government representatives, issued yearly guidelines on raises and bonus pay that served as the starting point for bargaining agreements. Foreign workers were generally concentrated in low-wage, low-skill jobs and were often required to work long hours in construction, shipbuilding, services, and domestic work.

The great majority of the approximately 227,100 FDWs (mainly from the Philippines and Indonesia) worked under clearly outlined contracts. Under the penal code, any employer of an FDW or a member of the employer's family, if convicted of certain offenses against the worker, such as causing hurt or insulting the modesty of the worker, are liable to a penalty of up to one and one-half times the mandated penalty when the victim is not a domestic worker. Nevertheless, there were regular reports of employers arrested for abuse or mistreatment of such workers (see section 7.b.). Pregnancy is a breach of the standard work permit conditions for such workers, and the government may cancel work permits and require repatriation of FDWs who become pregnant. According to an NGO, which surveyed 195 FDWs from July 2013 to October 2014, approximately six in 10 FDWs did not get a weekly day off in practice.

The NTUC reported that it advocated for the rights of all migrant work-permit holders through its Migrant Workers' Center. NGOs also played a role in advocating for the rights of migrant workers, including urging the government to address root causes of exploitation of migrants. One NGO highlighted the need for the government to act bilaterally to mitigate risks of exorbitant recruitment fees in countries of origin and to improve living conditions and increase the minimum wage for migrant workers. Some estimates placed migrant workers' hourly wage

at S\$2 (\$1.40) per hour, only 40 percent of the wage earned by low-skilled citizens and permanent residents.