

SINGAPORE 2018 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. The Elections Department declared Halimah Yacob president in 2017; she was the only candidate who qualified for the ballot, which was reserved that year for an ethnic Malay. Observers considered the 2015 general election free and open. The PAP won 83 of 89 parliamentary seats with 70 percent of the vote. The president subsequently reappointed PAP leader Lee Hsien-Loong as prime minister.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces.

Human rights issues included: preventive detention by government authorities under various laws that dispense with regular judicial due process; monitoring private electronic or telephone communications without a warrant; significant restrictions on the press and online, including the use of defamation laws to discourage criticism; laws and regulations significantly limiting the right of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity as well as criminalization of sexual activities between men, although the law on this was not enforced.

The government prosecuted officials who committed human rights abuses in previous years. There were no reports of officials who committed human rights abuses or prosecutions or reports of impunity for such abuses in the year to October.

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 the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

In May Singapore Civil Defense Force (SCDF) national serviceman Corporal Kok Yuen Chin died as a result of drowning in a pump well at a fire station during hazing celebrations. Five SCDF officers were charged in relation to his death.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

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 imprisonment and mandatory caning for approximately 30 offenses, such as certain cases of rape, robbery, and drug trafficking. 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, if first approved by the commissioner of prisons and reviewed by the Institutional Discipline Advisory Committee. Women and girls, men older than 50 years and boys younger than 16, men sentenced to death whose sentences were not commuted, and persons determined medically unfit were exempt from punishment by caning.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

There were no reports regarding prison or detention center conditions that raised human rights concerns.

Physical Conditions: There were no major concerns about physical conditions or inmate abuse in prisons and detention centers.

Administration: Prisoners may file complaints alleging mistreatment or misconduct to judicial authorities without censorship and may request investigation of credible allegations of problematic conditions. When called upon, the Provost Unit, which is located in the prison headquarters, investigates complaints. Criminal charges may be brought against government officials.

The Board of Visiting Justices, consisting of justices of the peace appointed by the minister for home affairs, examines the prison system and has oversight of any investigations undertaken by the Provost Unit. The board conducts regular prison inspections to ensure prisoners' basic welfare and adherence to prison regulations. It may also conduct random visits. All inmates have access to the visiting justices.

Authorities documented the results of investigations in a publicly accessible manner.

The Institutional Discipline Advisory Committee renders an opinion to the commissioner of prisons on whether corporal punishment was excessive.

The status of the arrestee or convict determined the frequency and type of permitted visits. In general authorities allowed family members and close relatives to visit inmates. Prison authorities must approve visits of nonrelatives.

Independent Monitoring: Authorities also allowed members of the press to visit the prisons.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention. The law permits arrest without warrant and detention without trial in defined circumstances. Persons detained under these circumstances have a limited right to judicial review of their case. The government generally observed the laws.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The Singapore Police Force (SPF), under the direction of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), maintains internal security. Since 2017, the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), under the Ministry of Defense, have trained for deployment alongside MHA for certain homeland security operations, including joint deterrence patrols with SPF in instances of heightened terrorism alerts.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the SPF and SAF. The Ministry of Home Affairs and the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau had effective means and adequate resources 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 Internal Security Act (ISA), provide for arrest without a warrant if the government determines the suspect acted in a manner

prejudicial to the security of the country. The law specifies that some offenses, such as robbery or rape, do not require an arrest warrant.

Those arrested according to regular criminal procedure must appear before a magistrate within 48 hours. The accused may not be held for more than 48 hours without a magistrate's approval. Authorities expeditiously charged and brought to trial the majority of those arrested. A functioning bail system existed.

Persons who faced criminal charges were allowed access to counsel at the end of police questioning when investigations were complete or nearly so. Any person accused of a capital crime is eligible to free counsel assigned by the state. The government also funded a Criminal Legal Aid Scheme run by the Law Society that covers additional, but not all, 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 a warrant or full judicial due process. ISA cases are subject to review by the courts to provide for strict compliance with its procedural requirements. Authorities invoked the ISA primarily against persons suspected of posing a security threat and employed the CLA mostly against persons suspected of organized crime activity or drug trafficking.

Pretrial Detention: Pretrial detention was not excessively long. Some individuals, however, were in prolonged detention without trial and with minimal judicial due process under laws that allowed for such 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 with formal endorsement from 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 a maximum of two years, which the minister may renew for an unlimited number of additional periods of up to two years each. ISA detainees are permitted legal counsel. An independent advisory board consisting of a Supreme Court judge and two other presidential appointees reviews each detainee's case within three months of initial detention and at intervals of not longer than 12 months thereafter. If the advisory board recommends that the detainee be released but the minister disagrees, the president has discretion over the detainee's continued detention.

As of September, there were active ISA orders of detention (ODs) against 21 persons for involvement in terrorism-related activities.

In January a self-radicalized Malaysian man, Muhammad Nur Hanief Abdul Jalil, who worked in Singapore and had access to the country's restricted Airfreight Center, was detained under the ISA and subsequently repatriated. Two self-radicalized citizens were detained under the ISA for intending to participate in armed violence overseas. Authorities detained parking warden Mohamed Faishal Mohamed Razali in April, and information technology engineer Ahmed Hussein Abdul Kadir Sheik Uduman in August under the ISA.

In addition to ODs, the ISA allows for issuance of restriction orders (ROs) that require an individual to seek official approval for a change of address or occupation, overseas travel, or participation in any public organization or activity. RO subjects could be required to report regularly to authorities. As of September, 21 persons were on ROs. This number included both released detainees and suspected terrorists who authorities never detained.

There is also a category of restriction called suspension direction (SD) that replaces an OD when suspended and may prohibit association with specified groups or individuals and overseas travel without prior written government approval. SDs also include reporting conditions. In July Munavar Baig Amina Begam was released from detention and issued an SD. Amina was detained in November 2017 for supporting the Islamic State and intending to join the group in Syria. As of September Amina was the only person subject to an SD.

The CLA, which must be renewed every five years, was amended and renewed in February. The amendments specified the criminal activities for which individuals can be detained without trial or placed under police supervision. According to 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; the president may extend detention for unlimited 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. Since March CLAC sessions have been chaired by sitting judges of the Supreme Court. 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 based on the

advice of the cabinet. The government used the CLA almost exclusively against serious criminal activities involving narcotics, loan sharks, or criminal organizations and not for political purposes.

The CLA allows for supervision within the community through means such as curfews, residence limitations, requirements to report regularly to authorities, and limitations on travel.

The Misuse of Drugs Act permits detention without trial in an approved institution for the purpose of the treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts. If a suspected drug abuser tests positive for an illegal drug or displays signs of drug withdrawal, 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. By law, the bureau director may order treatment as long as six months of a person determined by blood test or medical examination to be an abuser of intoxicating substances.

Detainee's Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: The constitution provides the right of habeas corpus in regular criminal law.

A February amendment to the CLA renders the minister for home affairs' decision on a suspect's criminal guilt final and not subject to appeal, as is the minister's subsequent decision on whether detention is necessary for reasons of public safety, peace and good order. The courts can, however, review the minister's decision based on the tests of illegality, irrationality, and procedural impropriety.

Persons detained under the CLA and remanded for trial may apply to the courts for a writ of habeas corpus. Persons detained without trial under the CLA may challenge the substantive basis for their detention only to the CLAC.

Under the ISA detainees may challenge their detention in the judicial system only by seeking judicial review of whether their detention complied with procedural requirements of the ISA. To do so, detainees make representations to an Advisory Board that is headed by a Supreme Court justice, but 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.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence. Some observers expressed concern about undue government influence in the judicial system. Laws limiting judicial review, moreover, permitted restrictions on individuals' constitutional rights.

To help ensure judicial independence, some commentators recommended that the attorney general's dual roles as public prosecutor and legal adviser should be separated. Commentators also called for the abolition of supernumerary judges and Judicial Commissioners. Judicial Commissioners are lawyers whom the president appoints, on the advice of the prime minister, to sit on the Supreme Court and to exercise the powers of judges for a limited period.

The ISA and amended CLA explicitly preclude normal judicial due process and empower the government to limit, on vaguely defined national security grounds, other fundamental liberties provided for in the constitution.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for a fair and public trial, except for persons detained under the ISA, CLA, and similar legislation. The judiciary generally enforced this right when applicable. Some commentators observed a small number of exceptions in cases involving direct challenges to the government or the ruling party. The judicial system generally provided those subject to it with an efficient judicial process.

In most circumstances, the criminal procedure code requires that when a defendant is first charged in court, the charges must be framed, read and explained to a defendant. After the charges are filed in court, the accused may seek advice of counsel before deciding whether to plead guilty or request a trial. At a pretrial hearing no earlier than eight weeks after criminal charges have been made, a judge determines whether there is sufficient evidence to proceed to trial and sets a court date.

Criminal defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence in most cases. The Misuse of Drugs Act is an exception; it stipulates that a person who possessed narcotics shall be assumed to be aware of the substance and places the burden on the defendant to prove otherwise, on a balance of probability. The same law also stipulates that if the amount of the narcotic is above set limits, the defendant must prove he or she did not have the drug for trafficking purposes.

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. The state did so for anyone facing a capital charge. Defense lawyers generally had sufficient time and facilities to prepare an adequate defense. Criminal defendants who do not speak or understand English, or who have limited proficiency, are provided with translation services at no cost. Defendants have the right to question prosecution witnesses and to provide witnesses and evidence on their own behalf.

Defendants enjoy the right of appeal, which must be filed within 14 days in most cases. The criminal procedure code provides for an automatic appeal process for all death sentence cases. The courts may offer nonviolent offenders the option of probation or paying a fine in lieu of incarceration. Those sentenced to death may ask for resentencing under certain circumstances, and judges may impose life imprisonment instead.

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

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Access to the courts is open, and citizens and residents have the right to sue for infringement of human rights.

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

The constitution does not address privacy rights; statutory or common law provide remedies for infringement of some aspects of privacy rights. 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 may search a person, home, or property without a warrant if they decide that such a search is necessary to preserve evidence or permissible according to discretionary powers of the ISA, CLA, Misuse of Drugs Act, or Undesirable Publications Act.

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, email, text messaging, or other digital communications intended to remain private. No court warrants are required for such operations.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

The constitution provides for freedom of expression but allows parliament to impose such restrictions on freedom of speech as it “considers necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of Singapore or any part thereof, friendly relations with other countries, public order or morality and restrictions designed to protect the privileges of Parliament or to provide against contempt of court, defamation or incitement to any offence.”

Freedom of Expression: The government significantly restricted any public statements that it contended would undermine social or religious harmony, or that did not safeguard national or public interest. Although government pressure to conform resulted in self-censorship among some journalists, there was an increase in open debate regarding some government policies. Overall, however, more people were publicly sanctioned for criticism of the government or its policies than in the previous year.

The Public Order and Safety (Special Powers) Act, which took effect in May, gives the minister for home affairs discretion to authorize special police powers if a “serious incident” such as a terrorist attack is occurring or there is a threat that it could. These powers allow the commissioner of police to prohibit anyone from taking or transmitting photographs or videos in a defined area, or from making text or audio messages about police operations. A breach of the order may lead to imprisonment for up to two years, a fine of up to S\$20,000 (\$14,600), or both.

In May the Attorney General’s Chambers (AGC) initiated contempt of court proceedings against two individuals it deemed to have made allegations of bias against judges or to have prejudged pending proceedings. These were the first such proceedings under legislation that took effect in October 2017. Activist Jolovan Wham was convicted in October for a Facebook post alleging that that “Malaysia’s judges are more independent than Singapore’s for cases with political implications.” Opposition politician John Tan Liang Joo, of the Singapore

Democratic Party, was convicted at the same time for commenting on his Facebook page in May that Wham's prosecution "only confirms that what he said is true." Both were awaiting sentencing as of November. Any person found guilty under the law may be fined up to S\$100,000 (\$73,000), jailed for up to three years, or both.

As of December procedural appeals continued in the AGC contempt of court proceedings opened in August 2017 against Li Shengwu, a nephew of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. Li had posted private Facebook comments in July 2017 criticizing the "litigious" nature of the government and the "pliant court system." The case is the first the AGC has filed because of private Facebook comments and the AGC used novel grounds to serve papers on Li extra-judicially, one of the procedural issues under review. While media and netizens shared the facts of the case, many were circumspect in commenting further because publishing material that prejudices a pending issue in court proceedings may constitute contempt of court.

The government-approved Speakers' Corner was the only outdoor venue where citizens could give public speeches without a Public Entertainment License. Speakers' Corner may be used for exhibitions, performances, assemblies and processions, and citizens do not need a police permit to hold these events. All event organizers must, however, 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, cause discomfort to, or inconvenience other park users or the general public.

Citizens need a permit to speak at indoor public gatherings outside of the hearing or view of nonparticipants if the topic refers to race or religion. Indoor, private events are not subject to the same restrictions. Organizers of private events, however, must prevent inadvertent access by uninvited guests, or they could be cited for noncompliance with the rules regarding public gatherings.

Press and Media Freedom: According to 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.

Government leaders urged news media to support its goals and help maintain social and religious harmony. In addition to enforcing strict defamation and press laws, the government's vigorous response to what it considered personal attacks on officials led journalists and editors to moderate or limit what was published. In previous years, the government sued journalists or online bloggers for defamation or for stories that authorities believed undermined racial and religious harmony.

Government managerial and financial control strongly influenced all print and some 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 publicly listed company with close ties to the government, which must approve (and may remove) the holders of management shares, who appoint or dismiss SPH management. The government investment company Temasek Holdings wholly owned MediaCorp. As a result, coverage of domestic events and reporting of sensitive foreign relations topics usually closely reflected official government policies and views.

Government-linked companies and organizations operated all domestic broadcast television channels and almost all radio stations. Only one radio station, the BBC's 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. Residents routinely accessed uncensored international radio and television content via the internet.

The government may limit broadcasts or the circulation of publications by "gazetting" them under the Broadcasting Act and may ban the circulation of domestic and foreign publications under provisions of the ISA or Undesirable Publications Act. The law 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 may 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 100,000 Singapore Dollars (SGD) (\$73,000) for failing to comply.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The Info-communications Media Development Authority (IMDA) is the statutory board under the Ministry of Communications and Information that regulates 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 law allows 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 March, despite 134 critical submissions from the arts community, the legislature passed an amendment to the Films Act that gives IMDA officers power to enter and search premises and seize evidence without a warrant for “serious offenses,” such as those involving films prohibited on public interest grounds or the unlicensed public exhibition of a film.

In September authorities imposed limitations on a documentary about the lives of Christian pastors in a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI)-affirming church in Taiwan, *The Shepherds*. IMDA restricted screenings to members of the Singapore Film Society and specified that panelists at a post-screening dialogue were not permitted to advocate for same-sex marriage.

Libel/Slander Laws: 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 maximum prison sentence of two years, a fine, or both. In November police opened an investigation into alleged criminal defamation by Terry Xu on his sociopolitical website, *The Online Citizen (TOC)*, after Xu published a reader’s letter in which the author accused the PAP leadership of “corruption at the highest echelons.”

Internet Freedom

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.

Individuals and groups could engage in the expression of views via the internet, including by email. The government, however, subjected all internet content to similar rules and standards as traditional media, as defined by the IMDA's Internet Code of Practice. Internet service providers are required to ensure that content complies with the code. The IMDA also regulates internet material by licensing the internet service providers through which local users are required to route their internet connections. The IMDA investigates content that is potentially in breach of the code when it receives complaints from members of the public.

The Online News Licensing Scheme requires more heavily visited internet news sites to obtain a license. The license requires these sites to submit a bond of 50,000 SGD (\$36,500) 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 a need to regulate commercial news sites and promote conformity with other forms of media such as print and television. As of November all major news sites were operating with IMDA licenses; the newest was the independent website *TOC*. Several other such sites have closed since 2016 (four reportedly closed in the reporting year), when 11 held licenses.

Smaller 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.

The internet was widely available and used. According to the International Telecommunications Union, approximately 85 percent of the population had access to the internet.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

Public institutions of higher education and political research had limited autonomy. Although faculty members were not technically government employees, they were potentially subject to 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 could result in sanctions. Publications by local academics and members of research institutions rarely deviated substantially from government views.

In April Donald Low, an associate dean of the Lee Kwan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, resigned his position. In April 2017 Low criticized remarks by Law and Home Affairs Minister K. Shanmugam, who in turn criticized Low. Low also gained media notice after criticizing a budget speech by Minister of Finance Heng Swee Keat and for praising a blogger convicted of derogatory internet remarks about Christians. Some critics commented publicly claimed that Low's resignation may have resulted from political pressure, although he himself declined to comment on the grounds for his departure.

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.

In January IMDA banned a documentary, *Radiance of Resistance*, which was to be shown as part of the Singapore Palestinian Film Festival. IMDA stated, "the skewed narrative of the film is inflammatory and has the potential to cause disharmony amongst the different races and religions in Singapore."

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Although the constitution provides citizens the right to peaceful assembly, parliament imposed restrictions in the interest of security, public order, or morality. 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. Per 2017 amendments to the Public Order Act, the Commissioner of Police may decline to authorize any public assembly or procession that could be directed towards a political end and be organized by, or involve the participation of, a foreign entity or citizen. The amendment followed a 2016 LGBTI “Freedom to Love” rally, after which the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a press statement stating “foreign entities should not interfere in our domestic issues, especially political issues or controversial social issues with political overtones.”

Police may also order a person to “move on” from a certain area and not return to the designated spot for 24 hours.

In April police denied a request by activist Terry Xu to stage a one-person, silent sit-in protest without signage for one hour. Police stated the late-night protest, which would have been held in the central business district during the weekend, carried “a risk of causing public disorder, as well as damage to property.”

In October artist Seelan Palay was convicted of breaching the Public Order Act for taking part in a public procession without a permit in October 2017. He was fined 2,500 SGD (\$1,820) but served two weeks in jail in lieu of the fine. Seelan had obtained a permit to stage a performance art piece as a protest in Hong Lim Park, but he later continued his solo protest by walking from the park to parliament buildings, holding a mirror. Prosecutors alleged Seelan did not specify in his permit request that he intended to move from the park to outside parliament.

Some civil society groups and members of parliament expressed concern that the Public Order and Safety (Special Powers) Act (see section 2.a.) conflates peaceful protests and terrorist violence. The law’s illustrations of “large-scale public disorder” include a peaceful sit-down demonstration that attracts a large group of sympathizers and which after a week starts to impede the flow of traffic and interfere with local business activities.

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 could deny registration to groups it believed were formed for unlawful purposes or for purposes prejudicial to public peace, welfare, or public order. The majority of applications in recent years 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. These may not receive foreign donations but may receive funds from citizens and locally controlled entities. The ruling PAP was able to use nonpolitical organizations, such as residential committees and neighborhood groups, for political purposes far more extensively than could opposition parties. Due to laws regulating the formation of publicly active organizations, there were few nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) apart from nonpolitical organizations, such as religious or environmental groups.

In April the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority (ACRA) declined to register OSEA Pte. Ltd., a local branch of a UK-based company that provides training and other support to journalists, as well as editorial services to a website called New Naratif. New Naratif's director PJ Thum and editor-in-chief Kirsten Han organize "democracy workshops" and are considered critical of the government. New Naratif also has subscribers not based in the country. ACRA explained that registration of OSEA would be contrary to national interests, as OSEA's purposes were "clearly political in nature" and its parent company had received a 75,000 SGD (\$54,700) grant from a foreign charitable foundation. In September Minister of Finance Heng Swee Keat rejected an appeal against ACRA's decision.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

d. Freedom of Movement

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. Government cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

and other humanitarian organizations with respect to asylum seekers and other refugees was limited.

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. Several dozen suspected terrorists were subject to such restrictions.

Foreign Travel: The government may refuse to issue a passport; in practice this was done 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 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.

The law allows the government to deprive naturalized citizens of citizenship if they have resided outside of the country for more than five consecutive years. Naturalized citizens may also lose their citizenship if they have engaged in activities deemed harmful to public safety and order.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law does not provide for granting asylum or refugee status. The government may, on a case-by-case basis, cooperate with organizations such as UNHCR to repatriate or send refugees to a third country.

Stateless Persons

As of January 2016 there were 1,411 legally stateless persons living in the country. Many were reportedly born in the country before independence but did not or could not meet requirements for citizenship then in force. Others were permanent residents who lost their foreign citizenship, or were children born to foreign nationals who are not recognized in their home countries. Stateless persons may apply for citizenship.

Approximately 80 percent of stateless persons have obtained permanent residency, but those who have not may not buy or rent real estate, are not entitled to

government health or education subsidies, and may have difficulty securing employment.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law provides citizens the ability to choose their government in open and free periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. Voting is compulsory and 93.7 percent of eligible voters voted in the 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, although it held a small fraction of parliamentary seats in the sitting parliament.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: The law provides for the popular election of the president to a six-year term from among candidates approved by two constitutionally prescribed committees selected by the government. The constitution also requires multiracial representation in the presidency. The office of the president is reserved for a member of a specific racial community (Chinese, Malay, or Indian and other minority communities) if no person belonging to that community had held the office of the president for any of the last five terms of office. The 2017 presidential election was reserved for eligible Malay candidates. In September 2017 former speaker of parliament Halimah Yacob became president without a vote because she was the only eligible candidate; two other applicants were ruled ineligible according to criteria applicable to private sector candidates.

The 2015 parliamentary general election was free 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 Workers' Party won the six seats it had carried in 2011. The general elections operate according to a first-past-the-post system. A constitutional provision assures at least nine opposition members in parliament; there were three nonconstituency members from the Workers' Party in the parliament, chosen from the highest-finishing runners-up in the general election.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The opposition criticized 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. For example, government-appointed and predominantly publicly funded Community Development Councils, which provide welfare and other services, strengthened the PAP's position. The PAP also had an extensive grassroots system and a carefully selected, highly disciplined membership.

The PAP controlled key positions in and out of government, influenced the press, and benefited from weak opposition parties. While the PAP's methods were fully consistent with the law and the normal prerogatives of a parliamentary government, the overall effect was to perpetuate PAP power. The constitutional requirement that members of parliament resign if expelled from their party helped promote 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 31 registered political parties, 12 of which were active.

Participation of Women and Minorities: No law limits the participation of women and minorities in the political process, and they did participate. Presidential elections may be reserved for certain racial communities. There are no other restrictions in law or practice against voting or political participation by minorities; they were well represented throughout the government, except in some sensitive national security positions.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

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

Corruption: Five cases of official corruption were reported in media during the year to December. In April the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau reported that eight cases of public sector corruption were investigated in 2017.

In one case, former general manager of the Ang Mo Kio town council Wong Chee Meng was charged in March with 55 counts of corruption, for receiving 107,000 SGD (\$78,000) in inducements from the directors of two building and repair companies. If convicted after his September trial, Wong could be imprisoned for a maximum seven years and fined as much as 100,000 SGD (\$73,000) for each charge.

In another case, former manager at the national library board Ivan Koh Siong Wee was charged in July with 56 counts of corruption, for receiving a total of 595,230 SGD (\$434,300) in bribes from company director Low Pok Woen. Each charge carries a penalty of up to five years' imprisonment and a 100,000 SGD (\$73,000) fine.

Financial Disclosure: The law requires civil servants to declare their investments, properties, and indebtedness to their respective permanent secretaries. According to 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.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses 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 according to 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: Rape is a crime, with maximum penalties of 20 years' imprisonment and the possibility of caning. By law only a man can commit rape. A man cannot legally be a victim of rape but 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 may 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. Domestic violence is a

crime. Victims may obtain court orders restraining the respondent and barring the spouse or former spouse from the home until the court is satisfied the spouse has ceased aggressive behavior.

Twenty-one women's and social sector groups issued a joint press release signaling their strong support for repealing marital immunity for rape.

In March parliament amended the Criminal Procedure Code and the Evidence Act to increase protection for victims of sexual crimes and child abuse within the judicial system. Identity protection orders became mandatory from the time a police report is lodged. Victims of sexual crimes may video-record their testimony instead of having to recount it in person. Victims may testify in closed-door hearings, with physical screens to shield them from the accused person. Lawyers may not ask questions about a victim's sexual history, unless the court grants them permission to do so.

Several voluntary welfare organizations that assisted abused women noted that gender-based violence was under-reported, which they said was the result of social stigma and a lack of understanding among the population at large as well as among police. The press gave prominent coverage to several instances of abuse or violence against women.

Welfare and advocacy organization AWARE, which operated a specialized care service for survivors of sexual violence, collaborated with police to develop a training video. The video, first used in the reporting year, helped police understand how victims of sexual crime feel, why they behave in certain ways, and how police and other first responders can assist them effectively.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Type I (a) (as classified by the World Health Organization) female genital mutilation/cutting was practiced among a small portion of the Muslim population. Referred to locally as “ceremonial” female circumcision, it was undertaken as a standardized procedure by designated doctors under the supervision of the Muslim Healthcare Professionals Association. There was no legislation banning FGM/C.

Sexual Harassment: Harassment is a crime and the law includes harassment within and outside the workplace, cyberbullying, and bullying of children. The law also prescribes mandatory caning and minimum of two years' imprisonment on conviction on any charge of “outraging modesty” that causes the victim to fear death or injury. The law also subjects persons convicted of using threatening,

abusive, or insulting words or behavior to maximum fines of 5,000 SGD (\$3,650). It also provides a range of self-help measures, civil remedies, and enhanced criminal sanctions to protect against harassment. Additionally, stalking is an offense punishable with a maximum fine of 5,000 SGD (\$3,650), imprisonment for up to 12 months, or both.

In February police highlighted sexual molestation on public transport as a concern. Outrage of modesty advisory posters were placed in buses and in subway stations, and public education videos screened on subway platforms. The police “Citizens on Patrol” program expanded its presence to the subway system, where volunteers gave out flyers raising awareness about molestation. In February and again in May, media reported cases in which a woman who was molested while traveling by bus enlisted the help of the bus driver and commuters to detain the alleged perpetrator until police arrived.

According to police statistics, outrage of modesty incidents increased by more than 21 percent in the first six months of the year (compared to the same period in 2017 (from 685 to 832 cases). AWARE reported that government campaigns encouraging women to report sexual molestation led to the increase. Media gave significant coverage to sexual harassment convictions throughout the year, and several members of parliament urged the government to address sexual harassment in the workplace more actively.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization.

Discrimination: Women enjoy the same legal rights as men, including civil liberties, employment, commercial activity, and education. Women were well represented in many professions (see section 7.d.).

No laws mandate nondiscrimination in hiring based on gender; prohibit employers from asking questions about a prospective employee’s family status during a job interview; require flexible or part-time work schedules for employees with minor children; or establish public provision of childcare. The Ministry of Manpower set aside 30 million SGD (\$21.9 million) to help employers implement flexible workplace practices.

Polygyny is permitted for Muslim men but is limited and strictly regulated by the Syariah Court and the Registry of Muslim Marriages, which oversees Muslim

marriages and other family law matters. Polygynous marriages constituted 0.2 percent of Muslim marriages.

Both men and women have the right to initiate divorce proceedings.

Children

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

Child Abuse: The law criminalizes mistreatment of children, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. The government enforced the law and provided support services for child-abuse victims.

Early and Forced Marriage: The law characterizes unmarried persons younger than 21 years as minors and persons younger than 14 as children. Individuals younger than 21 who wish to marry must obtain parental consent, and the couple must attend a mandatory marriage preparation program. Individuals younger than 18 also require a special license from the Ministry of Social and Family Development to wed or, if they are marrying under Muslim law, they require permission from the kadi (a Muslim judge appointed by the president), who will grant permission only under special conditions.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law criminalizes human trafficking, including child sex trafficking, and authorities enforced the law.

The age of consent for noncommercial sex is 16 years. Sexual intercourse with a person younger than 16 is punishable by a maximum of 10 years in prison, a fine, or both, and if the victim is 14 or younger punishable by as long as 20 years in prison and a fine or caning.

Authorities may detain (but generally do not prosecute) persons younger than 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/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/providers/legal-reports-and-data.html.

Anti-Semitism

Although estimates varied widely, the government estimated there were approximately 2,500 members in 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

There is no comprehensive legislation addressing equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in education or employment. 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.

In December 2017 a couple was imprisoned after the severe abuse they inflicted on their intellectually disabled roommate over a period of eight months resulted in her death. Tan Hui Zhen was jailed for 16 years and six months and her husband, Pua Hak Chuan, was jailed for 14 years and given 14 strokes of the cane for causing grievous hurt with a weapon to Annie Ee Yu Lian. The case gained national attention due to the victim's vulnerability, and a national petition called for harsher punishments for the pair.

The Ministry of Social and Family Development is responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities and coordinates implementation of the government's 2017-2021 policy plan for programs and services in the disability sector, which focuses on greater inclusiveness. The ministry began implementing the policy plan in January.

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, administered

several assistance schemes for persons with disabilities, and provided a job training and placement program for them.

The Disabled People's Association, an advocacy group, reported private discrimination against persons with disabilities who were seeking employment.

The country provided a high level of educational support for children and minors with disabilities from preschool to university. Elementary and secondary levels both included mainstreaming programs and separate education schools. All primary schools and the majority of secondary schools had specialist support for students with mild disabilities. Mainstreaming programs catered primarily to children with physical disabilities. Separate education schools, which focused on children who required more intensive and specialized assistance, were operated by social service organizations and involved a means-tested payment of fees. The Special Educational Needs Support Offices, established in all publicly funded tertiary education institutions including universities, provided support for students. Informal provisions permitted university matriculation for those with visual, hearing, or physical disabilities through assistive technology devices and services such as note taking.

In the 2015 general election, voters with visual disabilities could cast their vote independently with stencils. The Disabled People's Association recommended that persons with disabilities be permitted to choose who would assist them to mark and cast their ballots.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Ethnic Malays constituted approximately 13 percent of the population. The constitution recognizes them as the indigenous persons of the country and charges the government to support and promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social, cultural, and language interests. The government took steps to encourage greater educational achievement among Malay students and upgrading of skills among Malay workers, including through subsidies for tertiary education fees for poorer Malays. Malay educational performance has improved, although ethnic Malays have not yet 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 examines all pending bills to ensure they do not disadvantage any particular group. It also reports to the government on matters that affect 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, to 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 male-to-male sexual relations, subject to up to two years' imprisonment. The law does not criminalize female-to-female sexual relations. Authorities have not enforced the section for several years and stated that they will not do so. The prime minister and the minister for home affairs and law have said they personally are not opposed to male-to-male sexual relations. There were no indications the law was used intentionally to intimidate or coerce. The law's existence, however, intimidates some gay men, particularly those who are victims of sexual assault but who will not report it to the police for fear of being charged with violating Section 377A.

No laws explicitly protect 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, were unable to receive certain government services and benefits available to other citizens before reaching 35.

In September disc jockey Johnson Ong filed a constitutional challenge to Section 377A on the grounds it violates the right to "life and personal liberty" and the right to equality. The challenge argues that sexual orientation "is unchangeable or suppressible at unacceptable personal cost" and that the law applies only to sex between two men and not between two women. The High Court held a pretrial conferences in September.

LGBTI persons may experience discrimination in the military, which classifies individuals by sexual orientation and evaluates them on a scale of "effeminacy" to determine fitness for combat training and other assignments. Openly gay servicemen faced threats and harassment from their peers and were often ostracized.

A requirement that applicants for government employment declare their sexual orientation on job applications is no longer required.

Individuals were prohibited from updating their gender on official unless they underwent sex reassignment surgery.

Media censorship perpetuated negative stereotypes of LGBTI individuals by restricting portrayals of LGBTI life. The IMDA censored 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 persons with HIV/AIDS claimed that they were socially marginalized and faced employment discrimination or possible termination if they revealed their HIV/AIDS status. There is no law to prevent employers from firing a person based on their HIV status. Because of the above, many persons living with HIV fear losing their jobs if they disclose their HIV status. Some HIV-positive persons seek diagnosis and treatment outside the country.

The government discouraged discrimination, supported initiatives that countered misperceptions about HIV/AIDS, and publicly praised employers that welcomed workers with HIV/AIDS. HIV-positive foreigners are barred from obtaining work permits, student visas 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. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination.

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. Laws and regulations restrict freedom of association by requiring any group of 10 or more persons to register with the government. The law also restricts the right of

uniformed personnel and government employees to organize, although the president may grant exemptions. 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.

Unions were unable to carry out their work without interference from the government or political parties. The law limits how unions may spend their funds, prohibiting, for example, 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 their employees.

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 a cabinet minister and four PAP members of parliament were in NTUC leadership positions. NTUC policy prohibited union members who supported opposition parties from holding office in its affiliated unions. In November 2017 the NTUC announced that “where possible,” all 82 PAP members of parliament would act as advisors to NTUC unions and affiliated associations.

Collective bargaining was a routine 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.

Foreign workers constituted approximately 15 percent of union members. 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 and criminalizes all forms of forced or compulsory labor. The government effectively enforced the law; penalties included prison terms and fines, although these were not always sufficient to deter violations. The government took law enforcement action against employers for workplace violations, including arresting and prosecuting several employers for abuse or mistreatment of foreign domestic workers. It also investigated and imposed fines on some employment agencies for committing other illegal practices. Given the number of low-paid foreign workers in the country, however, outside observers believe that many cases of abuse likely were undetected.

Practices indicative of forced labor, including the withholding of wages and passports, occurred. Migrant workers in low-wage and unskilled sectors such as domestic work, hospitality, and construction were vulnerable to labor exploitation. The Ministry of Manpower reported, for example, that 48 foreign workers lodged complaints between January and April against Nihal Enterprise and Nihal Construction for defaulting on their salaries and overtime, with some workers remaining unpaid for one year. The workers were reportedly forced to sign blank salary slips but were either unpaid, or paid only a fraction of the amount owed.

The law caps the fees payable by foreign domestic workers to employment agencies in the country at one month's salary per year of the employment contract not to exceed two months' salary, irrespective of the duration of the contract. Observers noted that unscrupulous agencies in migrant workers' countries of origin could charge exorbitant fees.

Some observers also noted that the country's employer sponsorship system made legal migrant workers vulnerable to forced labor because they may not change employers without the consent of their 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 younger than 13 years. 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 only work in an industrial undertaking that employs members of his or her family. Ministry of Manpower regulations prohibit night employment of children and restrict industrial work for children between 15 and 16. Children

younger than 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 Ministry of Manpower effectively enforced these laws and regulations. Penalties for employers who violated laws related to child labor were subject to fines and/or imprisonment, practices that provided adequate deterrence. Government officials asserted that child labor was not a significant problem.

The incidence of children in formal employment was low, although some children worked in family enterprises.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The constitution provides for equality in employment. No specific antidiscrimination legislation exists, although some statutes prohibit certain forms of discrimination. For example, employers may not dismiss female employees during pregnancy or maternity leave, and employers may not dismiss employees solely due to age.

The Ministry of Manpower's Fair Consideration Framework requires all companies to comply with the Tripartite Guidelines on Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices and have 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 or other communicable disease status.

The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices received complaints of employment discrimination, largely due to the preference to hire foreigners over citizens.

In 2017 the gender wage gap was 9.2 percent, and women were underrepresented in managerial and executive positions. The country's Diversity Action Committee reported that women's representation on boards of companies listed on the

Singapore Exchange was 11.2 percent as of June. For the first time, as of June, a majority (51 percent) of listed companies had at least one female board member.

Some ethnic Malays and Indians reported discrimination limited their employment and promotion opportunities. There were also reports of discrimination based on disability, pregnancy, and sexual orientation/gender identity. Pregnancy is a breach of the standard work permit conditions for foreign workers, and the government cancels work permits and requires repatriation of foreign domestic workers who become pregnant.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The law does not specify a national minimum wage. The government's progressive wage model, designed to raise the productivity and wages of low-wage workers, requires businesses in the cleaning, landscaping, and security services sectors to pay a minimum wage in order to obtain a business license. The minimums range from 1,060 SGD (\$774) for an indoor cleaner to 2,100 SGD (\$1,530) for a qualified landscape supervisor. Legislation passed in October introduced a mandatory annual bonus for local cleaners.

The law sets the standard legal workweek at 44 hours. The law requires employers to apply for an overtime exception from the Ministry of Manpower for employees to work more than 72 hours of overtime per month. On November 20, the government amended the Employment Act to remove the existing salary cap on applicability of some workplace protections and expand the law's coverage to all private sector employees, except domestic workers and seafarers who are still covered under separate laws. The amended law also mandates benefits for part-time employees, defined as those working 35 hours or less. The changes will enter into effect in April 2019 and will entitle all private sector employees to paid sick leave, mandatory annual leave, and protection against wrongful dismissal.

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, but the law does not specifically protect the right of workers to remove themselves from a hazardous working environment.

The Ministry of Manpower effectively enforced laws and regulations establishing working conditions and comprehensive occupational safety and health regulations. Penalties for violating these regulations, which take the form of fines and stop-

work orders, were sufficient to deter violations. During the year, the ministry increased the number of workplace inspections and continued to promote training to reduce the frequency of job-related accidents in high-risk sectors such as construction. The government also enforced requirements for employers to provide one rest day per week or compensation for foreign domestic workers. Penalties for violations include fines or imprisonment.

In July a landscaping company and two of its officers were charged for a workplace accident in 2016 in which a foreign worker, Rahman Mohammad Aatur, was severely burned. Environmental Landscape's management reportedly pressured Rahman to clean an underground tank that exploded while he was inside it. The firm faced a maximum fine of 500,000 SGD (\$365,000), and its director, a fine of as much as 200,000 SGD (\$146,000) and/or a maximum of two years' imprisonment.

The ministry promoted educational and training programs to reduce the frequency of job-related accidents. The programs strengthen 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 Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management was jointly established in 2017 by the Ministry of Manpower, unions, and the employers' federation to offer advisory and mediation services to help employees and employers to manage employment disputes. The Labor Relations and Workplaces Division of the Ministry of Manpower provided free advisory services to both foreign and local workers who experienced problems with employers; it provided mediation services for a fee. The ministry operated a hotline for foreign domestic workers.

The majority of foreign workers were concentrated in low-wage, low-skill jobs and were often required to work long hours in construction, shipbuilding, services, and domestic work.

The majority of foreign domestic workers, mainly from the Philippines and Indonesia, worked under clearly outlined contracts. According to the penal code, any employer of a foreign domestic worker 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, is liable to a maximum penalty of one and one-half times the mandated penalty when the victim is not a domestic worker.

Nevertheless, there were reports of employers abusing or mistreating such workers (see section 7.b.).