

SINGAPORE 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Singapore is a parliamentary republic where the People's Action Party, in power since 1959, dominates 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 2020 general election to be free and open; the People's Action Party won 83 of 93 parliamentary seats with 61 percent of the vote. The president subsequently reappointed party leader Lee Hsien Loong as prime minister.

The Singapore Police Force, under the direction of the Ministry of Home Affairs, maintains internal security. The Singapore Armed Forces, under the Ministry of Defense, have trained for deployment alongside the Home Affairs Ministry for certain domestic security operations, including joint deterrence patrols with police in instances of heightened terrorism alerts. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were no credible reports of abuses by members of the security forces.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: preventive detention by the government under various laws that dispense with regular judicial due process; monitoring private electronic or telephone conversations without a warrant; serious restrictions on free expression and media, including criminal libel laws; restrictions on internet freedom; substantial legal and regulatory limitations on the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; and existence of a law criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between men, although not enforced.

The government prosecuted officials who committed human rights abuses and were involved in corruption. There were no reports of impunity for such abuses.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

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.

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 legally defined offenses while in prison if a review by the Institutional Discipline Advisory Committee deems it necessary and the commissioner of prisons approves. 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 caning.

Impunity was not a significant problem in the security forces. The government took active steps to investigate and file charges against members of the security services when it deemed their behavior inappropriate or illegal.

The trial of Central Narcotics Bureau officer Vengedesh Raj Nainar Nagarajan began in late 2020 and was still underway as of December. Nainar was charged with three counts of voluntarily causing hurt by seeking to extort a confession concerning drugs found in a suspect's possession in 2017.

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 regarding physical conditions or inmate abuse in prisons and detention centers.

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

The Board of Visiting Justices, composed of justices of the peace appointed by the home affairs minister, examines the prison system and oversees any investigations undertaken by the Provost Unit. The board conducts regular prison inspections to monitor 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. Members of the Board of Visiting Justices visited prisons at least once a month.

The Institutional Discipline Advisory Committee renders an opinion to the commissioner of prisons on whether an instance of corporal punishment (which is permitted) was excessive.

The status of the suspect 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 from nonrelatives.

Independent Monitoring: Authorities allowed members of the press to visit prisons with prior approval. It was not known if there were any visits during the year. The Ministry of Home Affairs also appointed a nongovernmental body composed of citizens to conduct regular prison inspections.

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 right to judicial review of their case, but the

scope is limited by the law. The government generally observed the laws.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

In most instances the law requires 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 or be released. Authorities expeditiously charged and brought to trial the majority of those arrested. A functioning bail system existed.

Persons who face criminal charges are allowed access to counsel within a “reasonable,” but undefined, period of time. Any person accused of a capital crime is entitled 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, trial, or full judicial due process in defined circumstances when there is evidence that a person is associated with any of the criminal activities listed in the law that pose a threat to public safety, peace, and good order. ISA cases are subject to review by the courts to provide for 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 government used the CLA against serious criminal activities involving narcotics, loan sharks, or criminal organizations. The law specifies the criminal activities for which individuals may be detained without trial or placed under police supervision. Before issuing a CLA detention order for an initial period of one year, the home affairs minister must obtain the consent of the public prosecutor. A Supreme Court judge chairs a committee that reviews all cases and conducts hearings at which detainees or their lawyers are present. The country's president considers the committee's recommendations when deciding whether to cancel, confirm, or amend the detention. The president may extend detention for unlimited additional periods of up to one year at a time. Each detention, however, is reviewed by a separate advisory committee on an annual basis. The CLA lapses unless parliament renews it every five years.

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 ISA authorizes the home affairs minister, 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, after which the minister may renew the detention indefinitely. 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 no longer than 12 months thereafter. If the advisory board recommends that the detainee be released but the minister disagrees, the president has discretion regarding the detainee's continued detention.

As of October the government held 19 persons under ISA orders of detention for alleged involvement in terrorism-related activities, and one person was under ISA detention for espionage-related conduct.

In January authorities disclosed the detention in December 2020 of a boy age 16 under the ISA for planning to attack two mosques using a machete on the anniversary of the March 2019 Christchurch, New Zealand attacks. The government stated this was the first case of a far-right inspired terrorist plotting an

act in the country and that he was the youngest detainee held under the ISA. The detainee was reportedly self-radicalized online and had taken concrete steps to prepare the attack.

In February, following a tip-off from the Ministry of Defense, authorities detained a man under the ISA for planning to attack and kill Jewish worshippers at the Maghain Aboth Synagogue (see section 6, Anti-Semitism).

In April authorities detained Ruqayyah binti Ramli, a 34-year-old woman, under the ISA for planning travel to Syria to join the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Ruqayyah, a former teacher at a religious school, had been subject to an ISA restriction order (see below) since August 2020 after she was radicalized by her Malaysian husband, who was detained under the ISA in July 2020 and deported to Malaysia. According to the government, Ruqayyah failed to respond to religious counseling and rehabilitation. Instead, her radical behavior escalated, and she continued communication online with overseas ISIS supporters.

In addition to detention, the ISA allows for issuance of restriction orders 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. Individuals subject to restriction orders could be required to report regularly to authorities. As of October, 28 individuals were subject to such restrictions for terrorism-related conduct. This number included both released ISA detainees and alleged terrorists whom authorities never detained.

In March the Ministry of Home Affairs announced that Sheik Heikel bin Khalid Bafana was released on a restriction order following detention since 2019 for his active involvement in the civil war in Yemen. In May Kuthubdeen Haja Najumudeen, a follower of Sri Lankan preacher Zahran Hashim, was released on a restriction order following his detention since 2019. Also in May, Ahmed Hussein Abdul Kadir son of Sheik Uduman was issued a restriction order after completing a prison sentence for terrorism financing offenses. He was previously detained under the ISA in 2018 before being charged with supporting ISIS and sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment in October 2019.

There is also a category of restriction called "suspension direction" that replaces a

suspended order of detention and may prohibit association with specified groups or individuals and overseas travel without prior written government approval.

Suspension directions also include reporting conditions. As of October, one individual was subject to suspension directions for terrorism-related conduct.

In May, Mohamed Faishal bin Mohd Razali was released on a suspension direction after his detention under the ISA since 2018 for his aspiration to pursue armed violence in overseas conflicts.

The drug laws permit the involuntary admission of drug addicts to an approved institution for treatment and rehabilitation without judicial approval. 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 for up to six months of a person determined by blood test or medical examination to be an abuser of intoxicating substances. The detained individual has the right to file a complaint to a magistrate who can issue an order to release the individual from the institution.

Detainee's Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: The constitution provides the right of habeas corpus in regular criminal law, although not in ISA or CLA cases.

Under the CLA, the decision by the minister for home affairs regarding a suspect's engagement in criminal activities is 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, once concurrence by the public prosecutor is secured. The courts can review the decision, but only 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 CLA advisory committee, which is chaired by a Supreme Court judge.

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; they have no right to challenge the substantive basis for their detention through the courts. Detainees under the ISA have a right to legal counsel and to make representations to an advisory board chaired by a past or sitting judge of the Supreme Court. 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 civil society activists and government critics expressed concern regarding undue government influence in the judicial system. Laws limiting judicial review, moreover, permitted restrictions on individuals' constitutional rights.

The ISA and CLA explicitly preclude normal judicial due process and empower the government to limit, on broadly 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 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 the 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. Cases

involving narcotics are an exception; the law 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. The 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 be represented 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. Those sentenced to death may ask for resentencing under certain circumstances, and judges may impose life imprisonment instead. The courts may offer certain offenders the option of probation or paying a fine in lieu of incarceration.

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. Several laws safeguard privacy, regulate access to and processing of personal data, and criminalize unauthorized access to data. Public agencies, however, are exempted from these data protection requirements; subject to public sector-specific laws, they can intercept communications and surveil individuals if it is determined to be in the national interest or necessary for investigations or proceedings.

The government generally respected the physical 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, and other laws.

Law enforcement authorities have broad powers to search electronic devices without judicial authorization, including while individuals are in custody. In 2020 Privacy International stated that, “Singapore has a well-established, centrally controlled technological surveillance system.” 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 and the law gives police access to computers and decryption information under defined circumstances.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

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 the country 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. Government pressure to conform influenced some journalists and users of the internet. Freedom House reported that self-censorship occurred in media and among academics.

In previous years international and regional human rights organizations criticized the government’s use of the law to bring contempt of court charges as a means to curtail speech. In August the Attorney-General’s Chambers started proceedings against Terry Xu, editor of alternative news website the *Online Citizen*, for contempt of court under the Administration of Justice Act. In January the *Online Citizen* published a post on its website and Facebook page questioning the equitability of the justice system and by doing so allegedly impugned the integrity of the judiciary.

The law 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 of one. 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 concerning police operations if these actions could compromise the effectiveness and safety of the law enforcement operations. A breach of the order may lead to imprisonment for up to two years, a substantial fine, or both.

The law prohibits the public display of any foreign national emblems, including flags or symbols of political organizations or leaders. The law restricts the use of the coat of arms, flag, and national anthem.

The government-approved Speakers’ Corner was the only outdoor venue where citizens or Singapore-registered entities could give public speeches without a police permit, provided certain criteria were met. Speakers’ Corner may be used for exhibitions, performances, assemblies, and processions. 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 has 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. Only citizens or permanent residents of the country are allowed to attend events at Speakers' Corner. If a police permit was obtained for an event there, non-resident foreigners may also attend.

Citizens need a permit to speak at indoor public gatherings 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 may be cited for noncompliance with the rules regarding public gatherings.

Freedom of Expression for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: According to the ISA and other legislation, 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 openly urged news media to support the government's goals and help maintain social and religious harmony. The government enforced strict defamation and press laws, likely resulting in journalists and editors moderating or limiting what they published. The government also strictly enforced laws protecting racial and religious harmony. In October the government passed a bill repealing the 1938 Sedition Act, which criminalized conduct with seditious tendencies and allowed the courts to suspend the publication and circulation of newspapers and publications containing seditious content. The government argued that newer laws better covered the offenses; it also amended the Penal and Criminal Procedure Codes to include offenses from the repealed Sedition Act that were not covered by more recent laws.

There were no legal bans on owning or operating private press outlets, although in practice government managerial and financial control strongly influenced all print and some electronic media. Two companies, Singapore Press Holdings Limited

and Mediacorp, owned all general circulation newspapers in the four official languages of English, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil. In September, Singapore Press Holdings, a publicly listed company with close ties to the government, transformed its media business into a not-for-profit company, SPH Media, independent of Singapore Press Holdings. The new company was to continue publishing the country's main newspaper, the *Straits Times*, as well as Chinese, Malay, and Tamil newspapers, and other digital and print products. Besides initial funding from Singapore Press Holdings, the Ministry of Communications and Information proclaimed its willingness to provide funding to SPH Media. Khaw Boon Wan, who held several government cabinet positions in the past, was named SPH Media's chairman. Both developments raised questions regarding the new media company's editorial independence and integrity. For instance, at Singapore Press Holdings the government had to approve (and could remove) the holders of management shares, who appointed or dismissed the firm's management. The country's other major newspaper owner, Mediacorp, was wholly owned by Temasek Holdings, the government investment company. As a result, its coverage of domestic events and reporting of sensitive foreign relations topics usually closely reflected official 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 a few exceptions, authorities prohibited satellite dishes. Cable television was widespread, and subscribers had access to numerous foreign television shows and a wide array of international news and entertainment channels. The government did not censor international news channels, but entertainment programs must meet the content codes of the state's Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA). Broadcasters often censored or edited content they anticipated would breach the IMDA code, such as content that normalized or positively portrayed lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) relationships. Residents routinely accessed uncensored international radio and television content via the internet.

The government may limit broadcasts or the circulation of publications by

“gazetting” (listing) them under the Broadcasting Act and may ban the circulation of domestic and foreign publications. The law empowers the minister for communications and information to gazette or place formal restrictions on any foreign broadcaster it assesses to be reporting on domestic politics in a one-sided or inaccurate manner.

The government may require a gazetted broadcaster to obtain express permission from the minister to continue broadcasting. The government may impose restrictions on the number of households receiving a broadcaster’s programming and may impose a substantial fine on a broadcaster for failing to comply.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The IMDA, under the Ministry of Communications and Information, regulates broadcast, print, and other media, including movies, video materials, computer games, and music. Most banned publications were sexually oriented materials but also included some religious and political publications. On November 1, the IMDA banned the book *Red Lines: Political Cartoons and the Struggle Against Censorship* by Hong Kong-based Singaporean academic Cherian George and Singaporean cartoonist Sonny Liew under the Undesirable Publications Act for containing 29 images that were found to be offensive and to denigrate Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity. Among the images in question were the 2006 Charlie Hebdo cartoons of Prophet Muhammad.

The IMDA stated it had banned six other publications in the past five years for denigrating various religious communities. 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 law 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. The IMDA has the power to sanction broadcasters for transmitting what it believes to be inappropriate content. All content shown between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. must be

suitable for viewers of all ages.

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

In March the Attorney-General's Chambers ended criminal defamation proceedings against lawyer Ravi Madasamy after Ravi removed a November 2020 Facebook post suggesting that Home Affairs and Law Minister K. Shanmugam "wields influence over the Chief Justice" and "calls the shots"; issued an apology accepting that the allegations were false; and published an undertaking not to repeat them. The Attorney-General's Chambers did not acquit Ravi but issued a 24-month conditional warning, allowing authorities to revive the charge if Ravi breached any of the conditions.

In November the *Online Citizen* website editor Terry Xu and site contributor Daniel De Costa were convicted of criminal defamation for a 2018 article accusing the People's Action Party (PAP) leadership of "corruption at the highest echelons."

In March a court found government critic and blogger Leong Sze Hian guilty in a 2018 civil defamation suit filed by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and ordered him to pay the prime minister 133,000 Singapore dollars (S\$) (\$97,200) in damages. In 2018 Leong had shared a news article on his Facebook page that alleged a secret deal between Lee and then Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak. The article alleged local banks assisted in laundering money from 1Malaysia Development Berhad. The judge reasoned that sharing the article was an act of "publishing." In April the court ordered Leong to pay the prime minister an additional S\$129,000 (\$94,300) in disbursements and legal fees.

In September the High Court awarded Prime Minister Lee a total of S\$210,000 (\$153,000) in damages in two separate civil defamation lawsuits against Xu and the *Online Citizen* writer Rubaashini Shunmuganathan for a 2019 article repeating allegations arising from a dispute between Lee and his two siblings. In October the court ordered Xu to pay the prime minister an additional S\$87,800 (\$64,200) for costs and disbursements for the lawsuit.

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 can direct service providers to block access to websites that, in the government's view, undermine public security, national defense, racial and religious harmony, or public morals. Political and religious websites must register with the IMDA.

Individuals and groups could express their views via the internet, including by email, and the internet is readily accessible. 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 provide content that complies with the code. The IMDA licenses 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 government invoked the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) 11 times during the year and issued 19 correction orders to 13 unique targets for content that government ministers deemed contained "falsehoods." The law requires individuals or online platforms, on a case-by-case basis, to publish corrections or remove online information that government ministers consider factually false or misleading, and which they deem likely to be prejudicial to the country, diminish public confidence in the government, incite feelings of ill will between persons, or influence an election. The law is not supposed to apply to opinions, criticisms, satire, or parody. Individuals in breach of the law may face a substantial fine and imprisonment for up to five years, with penalties doubled if the individual used bots. A platform that fails to remove false content may receive a substantial fine and, in the case of a continuing offense, a fine for each additional day the offense continues after conviction. In October the NGO International Commission of Jurists declared that since coming into force two years earlier, POFMA had been used by the government to "arbitrarily restrict the right to freedom of expression and information online." The commission called on the government to repeal the act or, failing that, to ensure that any

restrictions were “authorized pursuant to an order by an independent and impartial judicial authority,” among other substantial amendments.

The government issued most POFMA orders in response to COVID-19 “falsehoods” and all orders directed individuals and internet platforms to publish corrections. In contrast to 2020, however, the government refrained from issuing any of the more severe orders such as disabling in-country users’ access to specific social media accounts or blocking access to websites. In May the government issued its first “general correction direction” to foreign internet intermediaries, requiring Twitter and Facebook to carry a correction notice to all end users who used their services in-country. In two other incidents, the government issued a “targeted correction direction” requiring internet intermediaries to directly communicate a correction notice to all in-country users who had accessed the “falsehood” in question instead of just adding a correction to the “falsehood.” No ministries withdrew their orders following appeals by recipients.

In October the Court of Appeal issued what media termed a “landmark judgment,” rejecting an appeal by the *Online Citizen* against its January 2020 correction direction and dismissing two appeals by the opposition Singapore Democratic Party against its December 2019 direction, but partly sustaining the party’s third appeal on an issue of terminology while upholding the direction in principle. The Court of Appeal ruled more broadly that POFMA was constitutional; that it could be used even against an internet user who simply repeated an alleged falsehood without endorsing or making the allegation; and that the burden of proof lay with the recipient of the direction until the recipient succeeded in making an arguable case that the direction should be set aside. At the same time, the Court of Appeal held that a court, and not a minister, would make the final determination whether an online statement in question was true or false.

The Online News Licensing Scheme requires heavily visited internet sites focused on news regarding the country to obtain a license, submit a bond of S\$50,000 (\$36,500), and 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 cited the need to regulate commercial news sites and promote conformity with other forms of media such as print and television. All 10

major news sites operated with IMDA licenses.

Smaller news sites that cover political topics are required to register under the Broadcasting Act for a Class License, which requires registrants to report their income sources and not receive foreign funding. In September the IMDA suspended the Broadcasting (Class License) Notification of alternative news website the *Online Citizen* with immediate effect for allegedly failing to declare its sources of funding. *The Online Citizen*, which had been operating under this license since 2014, took down its website and social media pages on September 16. Reporters without Borders observed that the website was “subjected to endless harassment” and was “clearly being made to pay for its editorial independence.” The IMDA cancelled the license permanently on October 15.

In September the Ministry of Home Affairs introduced the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act to strengthen the country’s ability to “prevent, detect, and disrupt foreign interference” in domestic politics conducted through hostile information campaigns and the use of local proxies. The bill was passed in October and expanded the government’s powers and tools to control “foreign influence.” For example, the minister for home affairs could compel internet and social media service providers to disclose information, remove online content, block user accounts, and take “countermeasures” against “politically significant persons” who are or are suspected of working on behalf of or receiving funding from “foreign political organizations” and “foreign principals.” Opposition parties in parliament expressed concerns regarding the law’s expansion of executive powers. CIVICUS, Human Rights Watch, and nine other international NGOs warned that the legislation contravened the rights to freedom of expression, association, participation in public affairs, and privacy, and would “further curtail civic space, both online and offline.”

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

fields could result in sanctions. Freedom House noted that self-censorship on topics related to the country occurred among academics, who may face legal and career consequences for critical speech. Publications by local academics and members of research institutions rarely deviated substantially from government views.

In January the National University of Singapore Press justified its reversal of a decision to publish a book on Thai politics edited by Associate Professor Pavin Chachavalpongpun after more than 100 academics signed an open letter accusing the university of withdrawing the book due to “political pressure.” The university press stated the decision was made after consulting with internal and external stakeholders and that its decision may be “different than those taken by presses without a stake in the region.”

In August the National University of Singapore (NUS) announced it would stop accepting new students for the Yale-NUS College and merge it with its University Scholars Program in 2022 to form a new college in which Yale University would “continue to play an advisory role.” The final cohort of students at Yale-NUS, which the university established in partnership with Yale in 2011, would graduate in 2025. The university justified the merger, citing its desire to expand its own interdisciplinary education and design a common curriculum that offered broader and more specialized programs through deeper integration with NUS. Speaking in parliament, Education Minister Chan Chun Sing denied the merger would have any impact on academic freedom. The decision drew criticism from students and parents for the lack of transparency and consultation with affected staff and students in the decision-making process. More than 14,000 individuals signed an online petition calling on NUS to reverse the merger. Over the years, Yale-NUS was seen as a college with an increased level of student activism, and the college itself was involved in several controversies, most notably after it cancelled a course in 2019 on “Dialogue and Dissent in Singapore.”

In August, AcademiaSG, a website formed in 2019 by a group of Singaporean academics, published a survey on academic freedom based on 198 responses from academics affiliated with five local universities. Among the respondents, 77.5 percent reported at least “moderate” interference by nonacademic actors in their

decision making. More than a quarter reported consistent censorship or self-censorship in at least some disciplines and one-third knew of cases where colleagues had been told to withdraw or modify research findings for administrative reasons. Most respondents, however, believed they had freedom to do research (84.3 percent), teach (85.9 percent), and engage with a wider nonacademic audience (62.2 percent). The perceived ability to exercise these freedoms was significantly more limited among respondents who were working on sensitive and controversial topics, were women, or were foreign nationals.

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 ministry to exempt any film from the act.

Certain films barred from general release may be allowed limited showings, either censored or uncensored.

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. It is a criminal offense to organize or participate in a public assembly without a police permit, and those convicted may be assessed a substantial fine. Repeat offenders face a steeper fine.

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

International human rights organizations criticized authorities' use of the law and concerns regarding public order to prevent peaceful protest, especially by human rights defenders. Human Rights Watch lamented the government's use of "laws that violate international standards . . . against the country's few remaining dissenting voices." Amnesty International called on the government to stop "its penalization, intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders and activists."

In January police arrested three individuals under the Public Order Act for taking part in a public assembly without a permit. The three were part of a group of five who protested with placards and flags outside the Ministry of Education following a debate earlier that month concerning the ministry's position on hormone therapy for transgender students (see section 6). The two others left the scene before police arrived. In November police issued warnings to six individuals involved in the protest, including the three arrested protesters, who received more severe conditional warnings that any criminal conduct during a specified future period could subject them to prosecution also for the January protest.

Also in January, a man, Yan Jun, was put on trial for holding an illegal one-person protest outside a western embassy in November 2020 and behaving in a disorderly manner. Yan was a repeat offender convicted of holding public assemblies without a valid permit in the past. He was sentenced to six months in jail and fined S\$5,000 (\$3,700).

In February police investigated three men – two Japanese, one Indonesian – for participating in a public assembly without a permit outside the Burmese Embassy after the military coup and issued them stern warnings. Police had previously issued a warning against plans to hold protests concerning the situation in Burma.

In March police started an investigation of PAP member of parliament Louis Ng for holding a public assembly without a permit in June 2020, after he took a photo of himself holding up a sign with a smiley face in support of local food centers and posted it on social media. Investigations continued as of December.

In August a district court heard arguments in an illegal assembly case under the Public Order Act against activist Jolovan Wham for holding up a sign and taking a photo outside the former State Courts building in 2018. The case continued as of

December. At year's end another illegal assembly case was pending against Wham for a one-person protest without a permit when he held up a sign with a hand-drawn smiley face outside a police station in 2020 to demonstrate support for two climate activists.

In December a court charged activist Gilbert Goh under the Public Order Act for staging a protest without a permit. In May Goh held a placard next to the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority Building demanding cancellation of all flights from India due to COVID-19. Goh was also issued a stern warning for failing to comply with conditions for organizing an assembly at Speakers' Corner in 2019 after foreigners participated in the event, for which Goh had not obtained a police permit.

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. The government could deny registration to or dissolve groups it believed were formed for unlawful purposes or for purposes prejudicial to public peace, welfare, or public order, although it approved the majority of applications in recent years. 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 NGOs apart from nonpolitical organizations, such as religious or environmental groups.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

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.

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. Freedom of movement for migrant workers required to quarantine under temporary COVID-19 legislation continued to be restricted during the pandemic and remained significantly more limited and controlled than for the rest of the population (see section 7.e.).

Foreign Travel: The government may refuse to issue a passport; this was done primarily on security grounds.

Persons with national service reserve obligations (male citizens and permanent residents between ages 18 and 40 for enlisted men, or between 18 and 50 for officers) 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 engaged in activities deemed harmful to public safety and order or resided outside of the country for more than five consecutive years and either did not register annually at a consulate or were believed by the government to have no intention of retaining citizenship.

e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

f. Protection of Refugees

The government may, on a case-by-case basis, cooperate with organizations such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to repatriate or send refugees to a third country.

Access to Asylum: The law does not provide for granting asylum or refugee status.

g. Stateless Persons

As of December 2020, there were 1,095 stateless persons 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 as citizens in their home countries. Stateless persons may apply for citizenship.

Approximately 76 percent of stateless persons have obtained permanent residency, but those who have not done so 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. In five decades of continuous rule, however, the PAP employed a variety of measures that effectively limited the ability of the opposition to mount a serious challenge to its hold on power. In recent years the opposition won additional seats, although it still held a small fraction of seats in 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 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 thus restricted to eligible Malay candidates. In 2017 former speaker of parliament Halimah Yacob became president without a vote because she was the only candidate; two other applicants were ruled ineligible according to criteria applicable to private-sector candidates.

The 2020 parliamentary general election was free and open. In addition to the governing PAP, 10 opposition parties participated in the election, and all seats were contested for the second time since independence. The general elections operate according to a first-past-the-post system, and there are both single-member and group constituencies. The PAP won 61 percent of the popular vote, capturing 83 of 93 seats in parliament. The opposition Workers' Party won 10 seats, the most seats won by the opposition since independence. Because a constitutional provision mandates at least 12 opposition members in parliament, two losing candidates from the newly founded Progress Singapore Party were also seated as nonconstituency members of parliament, chosen from the highest finishing runners-up in the general election.

In September police issued a “stern warning” to Dr. Thum Ping Tjin, director of Observatory Southeast Asia and publisher of sociopolitical website *New Naratif*, for “unauthorized paid election advertisements” published on the website during the 2020 general election campaign. Police opened an investigation following a report filed by the Elections Department concerning five paid advertisements *New Naratif* was not authorized to publish, a potential breach of the law. Police found the advertisements “were intended to prejudice the electoral prospects of a political party” but, in consultation with the Attorney-General’s Chambers, issued a stern warning “in lieu of prosecution.”

Political Parties and Political Participation: The opposition criticized the PAP for its abuse of 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 constitutional requirement that members of parliament resign if expelled from their party helped promote backbencher discipline.

The PAP controlled key positions in and out of government, influenced the press, and benefited from structural advantages such as the group constituency system and short campaign period that disadvantaged smaller opposition parties, according to some human rights groups. While the PAP's methods were consistent with the law and the prerogatives of parliamentary government in the country, the overall effect was to perpetuate PAP power. The government created the institutionalized position of an official leader of the opposition in parliament following the 2020 general election, which the Workers' Party accepted.

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 and a requirement to report donations. There were 33 registered political parties, 14 of which were active.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No law limits the participation of women and members of historically marginalized or minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. Three of the 20 members of the cabinet were women, and seven were members of a minority group. The country's female president was a minority-group member. Presidential elections may be reserved for certain racial communities. There are no other restrictions in law or practice against voting or political participation by members of minority groups; they were well represented throughout the government and civil service, except in some sensitive national security positions in the armed forces and intelligence community. The country's group representation constituency system also requires at least one candidate from a racial minority group in each group constituency to provide representation in parliament.

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. There were isolated reports of government corruption.

Corruption: Among the 81 cases the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau investigated in 2020, 11 were public-sector related. Of the 129 individuals prosecuted in court for corruption in 2020, three were public-sector employees.

In September former senior Land Transport Authority officer Henry Foo Yung Thye was sentenced to 5.5 years' imprisonment and ordered to pay a penalty of S\$1.16 million (\$845,000) after he pleaded guilty to seven counts of corruption. Foo had been charged with 36 counts of corruption for accepting bribes amounting to S\$1.24 million (\$906,000). In May two of the seven other individuals – both citizens and foreigners – who were also charged in the case were jailed for eight months each.

In November a district court sentenced former Public Utilities Board assistant engineer Jamaludin Mohamed to nine months' jail time for accepting bribes, imposed a further 10 weeks for attempting to receive a bribe, and required him to pay the sum he received as a penalty or serve an additional three months in jail. From 2017 to 2018 he took bribes totaling approximately S\$45,000 (\$32,900) from an employee of Pipe Works PTE Ltd for facilitating and speeding up work performed by the company. In 2019 he allegedly sought a bribe of S\$500,000 (\$365,000) from a civil engineering firm that had submitted a bid for a Public Utilities Board tender and an unspecified amount from another company bidding for the same tender. Jamaludin was also sentenced to two weeks in jail for falsifying accounts.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A variety of domestic human rights groups generally operated without government

interference, but subject to close monitoring and legal restraints, 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 LGBTQI+ persons. They charged that the government generally ignored such criticisms or published rebuttals.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Under the law rape is a crime, with maximum penalties of 20 years' imprisonment and the possibility of caning. There is no marital immunity for rape and the definition of rape is gender neutral. The law imposes up to twice the maximum penalty for offenses affecting the human body – “rape, hurt, or wrongful confinement” – committed by partners in a close or intimate relationship (even if unmarried) than it imposes for these offenses committed outside such relationships. Domestic violence is a crime. Victims may obtain court orders restraining the respondent and barring a spouse or former spouse from the victim's home until the court is satisfied the spouse has ceased aggressive behavior. The government enforced the laws on rape and domestic violence.

Identity protection orders are mandatory for sexual crimes or child abuse even before 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 concerning a victim's sexual history unless the court grants them permission to do so.

Several voluntary welfare organizations that assisted abused women noted gender-

based violence was underreported but that the number of reported incidents was increasing, which they stated was the result of advocacy campaigns to address social stigma.

Releasing statistics on family violence for the first time, police in January disclosed that in 2020, 5,135 reports were made, of which 1,115 were referred to family service centers or family violence specialist centers. Reported abuses included causing hurt, using criminal force, assault, criminal intimidation, and wrongful confinement. The Ministry of Home Affairs saw a 10 percent increase in family violence cases every month between April and December 2020, which it attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. In October a court sentenced a man to 29 years' imprisonment and 24 strokes of the cane for raping his 13-year-old daughter and forcing his 15-year-old son to rape his biological mother. The judge termed the man's acts "an assault on the basic values of being human."

In January the Ministry of Social and Family Development launched the country's first 24-hour national helpline dedicated to addressing family violence and other cases of abuse and neglect, providing support in the country's four main languages. The helpline received 3,700 calls from January to June. Another 10 helplines to report child abuse and family violence remained in operation.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Types I (a) and IV (as classified by the World Health Organization) FGM/C were practiced among a portion of the Muslim population. There was no legislation banning FGM/C and no official data on how prevalent the practice was, but 75 percent of Muslim women indicated they had undergone FGM/C, according to an End FGC Singapore survey with a sample size of 360 women in late 2020. Some medical clinics offer the procedure, requiring parents to consent and go through counseling, according to the Singapore Muslim Women's Association. This medicalization, however, contravenes the global normative guidance by the World Health Organization and the UN Population Fund on this harmful practice. End FGC Singapore, a community-based movement, criticized the practice as covert and stated girls often may not know they underwent the procedure until later in life.

Sexual Harassment: Harassment is a crime, and the law covers harassment within and outside the workplace, cyberbullying, and bullying of children. The

law also prescribes mandatory caning and imprisonment (see below) on conviction of any charge for “outraging modesty” that causes the victim to fear death or injury. The law also subjects to a fine persons convicted of using threatening, abusive, or insulting words or behavior. 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 by a fine, imprisonment for up to 12 months, or both.

The law makes technology-related crimes such as voyeurism and sexual exposure criminal offenses. Doxing (publishing private information regarding a person or organization on the internet with the intent to harass) is also an offense.

In June amendments to the Protection from Harassment Act took effect, increasing protections for victims. It became easier to obtain protection orders; if a person was convicted of any previous harassment or hurt-related offense against the victim, the requirement to show that a provision under the act was contravened is deemed to be satisfied, and a protection order can be granted. Judges granting expedited protection orders must consider whether a criminal investigation is warranted and, if so, refer cases for police investigation. Breaches of orders are arrestable if harm was caused. Protection orders can be extended to persons related to the victim who might be harassed by the perpetrator. Domestic exclusion orders can be granted to protect victims residing with the harasser. The amendment also established a specialized Protection from Harassment Court to hear all criminal and civil harassment cases, such as doxing and threatening behavior, to provide faster relief. Applications for protection orders and orders relating to falsehoods are eligible for simplified court processes through an online portal and may be heard within 24 hours if actual violence or risk of violence is involved. Those who repeatedly breach protection orders are subject to up to twice the normal maximum penalty.

In September amendments to the Penal Code increased penalties for outrage of modesty from two to three years. According to police statistics, outrage of modesty incidents decreased by 17.8 percent in 2020 to 1,320 incidents.

The women’s rights advocacy group AWARE reported a 36 percent increase in technology-facilitated sexual violence in 2020 with 191 cases. Total cases of

sexual violence increased from 777 in 2019 to 967 cases in 2020. In July AWARE and the National Youth Council jointly funded a new website to educate the community on the most common types of online harassment and to provide assistance.

A November 2020 national survey by AWARE found that two in five of the 1,000 respondents had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace and that 13 percent had been touched physically. Only one in three victims reported such incidents.

Media gave significant coverage to sexual harassment convictions throughout the year. The government ran awareness campaigns encouraging women to report molestation, and several members of parliament urged the government to address sexual harassment in the workplace more actively.

Following several sexual harassment cases in recent years, the National University of Singapore reported in August that from January through June, one researcher was dismissed for making inappropriate sexual remarks, sending inappropriate videos to two students, and touching one of them without consent; two students were expelled for sexual misconduct; and there were eight other cases of alleged sexual misconduct involving students.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services, including emergency contraception, for survivors of sexual violence.

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.).

Polygyny is permitted for Muslim men but is limited and strictly regulated by the Registry of Muslim Marriages, which oversees Muslim marriages and other family law matters. Polygynous marriages constituted 0.2 percent of Muslim marriages.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

Various laws such as the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act and the Penal Code criminalize violence and incitement of violence against racial, ethnic, and religious minorities or groups. The government takes a proactive stance in fighting racial and ethnic discrimination and enforces the law effectively. Racially motivated violence was almost nonexistent, and even cases of racial discrimination were rare but did occur.

In May police arrested a 30-year-old ethnic Chinese man for making offensive racial remarks and assaulting a 55-year-old ethnic Indian woman. He was charged with one count of voluntarily causing hurt and one count of uttering words with intent to wound the racial feelings of a person. Court proceedings continued as of December. Prime Minister Lee, President Halimah Yacob, and several ministers condemned the attack and declared it went “against everything” the country’s multiracial society stood for. In July a 33-year-old man was arrested and charged with voluntarily causing hurt and intentional harassment after he punched and kicked an ethnic Chinese university student in a park and used a racist slur against another. Court proceedings continued as of December. Throughout the year individuals who committed racist or racially insensitive verbal offenses were prosecuted and sentenced under the law.

The Presidential Council on Minority Rights examines all pending bills so they do not disadvantage any particular group. It also reports to the government on matters that affect any racial or religious community.

Government measures to mitigate racial and ethnic biases and promote ethnic and racial harmony included mandated representation of all major ethnic groups in elected and non-elected government positions; allocation of public holidays for each racial group; and the use of four official languages, with an emphasis in schools on teaching English as the common language. There was no systemic racial discrimination in terms of access to education.

The opposition and civil society groups criticized various policies for their negative side effects on access to some services and the freedom of choice of residence. They also charged that the government’s policy of assigning each

person a race besides the national identity would prevent the society from achieving a post-racial state and that forms of racial discrimination would persist in everyday situations such as house rentals and employment.

Indigenous Peoples

Ethnic Malays constituted approximately 15 percent of the population. The constitution recognizes them as the indigenous inhabitants of the country and charges the government with supporting and promoting their political, educational, religious, economic, social, cultural, and linguistic interests. The government took steps to encourage educational achievement among Malay students and upgrade 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 the result of employment discrimination.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship derives from one's parents as long as one parent is a citizen of the country and the parents are registered as legally married. The law requires that all births be registered within 42 days. Dual citizens born abroad to citizen parents must renounce their foreign citizenship after turning 21 to retain their citizenship.

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.

The Ministry of Social and Family Development investigated 1,313 child abuse cases in 2020, a 21 percent increase from 2019 and the highest number in 10 years.

The courts sentenced several men to long prison terms for sexually abusing their

children. In February a perpetrator was sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment and 24 strokes of the cane for raping his daughter. In April and July two other perpetrators were sentenced to 24 strokes of the cane each, and to 28 years' and 29 years' imprisonment, respectively, for sexually assaulting their daughters.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The law characterizes unmarried persons younger than age 21 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 should 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. 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 younger than 14 it is punishable by up to 40 years in prison and a fine or caning.

The law prohibits commercial sex provided by anyone younger than age 18. Authorities may detain (but generally do not prosecute) persons younger than 18 whom they believe to be engaged in commercial sex. They prosecute those who organize or profit from commercial sex, bring women or girls to the country for commercial sex, or coerce or deceive women or girls into commercial sex.

The law protects minors from sexual exploitation and makes a distinction between child pornography and other types of pornography. It is a separate offense to use or involve a child younger than age 16 in the production of child-abuse material and a crime to be involved in the supply and consumption of child-abuse material. The law criminalizes offenses, such as sexual intercourse, pornography, or sexual grooming, committed in the context of exploitative relationships when the victim was older than age 16 but younger than age 18, even if the victim had consented.

In September the Penal Code was amended to increase the maximum imprisonment from one to two years for engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a minor between ages 14 and 16 or causing a person of that age to view sexual images. The same penalty applies if the victim was between ages 16 and 18 and the offender was in an exploitative relationship with the minor. By law those convicted under the Penal Code for any offenses committed against vulnerable victims – children younger than age 14, persons with mental or physical disabilities, and domestic workers (see section 7.e.) – are subject to up to twice the maximum penalty.

In January the High Court sustained the prosecution's appeal in the case of a 25-year-old man who had sex with a then 13-year-old in 2017 and increased his prison sentence from 24 to 33 months.

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 <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

Anti-Semitism

Although estimates varied widely, the government estimated there were approximately 2,500 members in the Jewish community. In February, following a tip-off from the Ministry of Defense, authorities detained Amirull bin Ali, a 20-year-old man, under the ISA for planning to attack and kill Jewish worshippers with a knife at the Maghain Aboth Synagogue. According to the government, Amirull, a full-time national serviceman with the Singapore Armed Forces when arrested, had been self-radicalized online. The government stated this was the first time an individual was motivated by the Israel-Palestine conflict to plot an attack in the country (section 1.d.).

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Persons with Disabilities

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

The Ministry of Social and Family Development is responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities and coordinates implementation of the government's 2017-21 policy plan for programs and services in the disability sector, which focuses on greater inclusiveness. The law provides grants, legal protection, and training to employers and persons with disabilities to provide better safeguards for employees, including persons with disabilities.

In December 2020 the government launched an *Enabling Lives Initiative* grant for public education to build positive attitudes towards persons with disabilities. In April it launched a pilot program to improve case management support for persons with disabilities who had high support needs and their families. Three SGUnited Jobs and Skills schemes were also set in motion during the year for persons with disabilities: place-and-train programs, attach-and-train programs, and skills development programs. Sign-language interpretation was provided for live televised broadcasts of key national communications, and all public buses were wheelchair accessible. These initiatives formed part of the country's 2017-21 Third Enabling Masterplan, a national road map to building a more inclusive society for persons with disabilities.

The government maintained a comprehensive code on barrier-free accessibility and standards for facilities for persons with physical disabilities in all new buildings and mandated the progressive upgrading of older structures. The SG Enable program, 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. In July a "Caregiver Action Map" was launched to provide social service agencies and other organizations that seek to develop or improve support for caregivers of persons with disabilities with guidance on how this could be achieved. The map was developed by the Coalition of Partners for Caregivers Support and will be facilitated by SG Enable and the Institute of Policy Studies.

The country's 2020 census for the first time included data on persons with disabilities, defined as persons who had difficulties performing basic activities such as seeing, hearing, remembering, self-care, communicating, or moving around. In total, 97,600 residents ages five and older had difficulties performing at least one basic activity. Organizations supporting persons with disabilities welcomed the data to help address specific community needs but criticized the omission of specific reference to persons with disabilities.

The government reported that in 2020 companies hired more than 9,200 persons with disabilities through use of government-sponsored support programs, an increase of 2.2 percent from 2019.

The Disabled People's Association, an advocacy group, indicated that discrimination against persons with disabilities was underreported because affected individuals either did not file a complaint or were unaware of their rights and the available resources. The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices received an average of two complaints per year of discrimination against persons with disabilities between 2014 and the first half of 2021. The Disabled People's Association also 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. Children with moderate to severe educational needs were required to participate in compulsory education until they reached age 15. Elementary and secondary levels both included mainstreaming programs and separate education schools. All primary schools and most 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.

The law allows voters who are unable to vote in the manner described by law to receive assistance from election officials, who are under oath to maintain voting secrecy. For the 2020 general election, the government improved support for persons with disabilities. Voters with visual disabilities could cast their vote independently with stencils, wheelchair users could use a portable booth placed on their laps, and those with physical disabilities could instruct election officials to mark the ballot paper on their behalf. Polling stations were barrier-free with special drop-off points.

In February a 34-year-old woman was sentenced to 8.5 years' imprisonment for physically abusing a woman with a mild intellectual disability. The perpetrator pleaded guilty to two counts of voluntarily causing hurt and one count of twisting the victim's toe with a pair of pliers until it fractured. She had splashed hot water on the victim and used a hammer to strike her mouth, causing her to lose two teeth. She and her family had repeatedly abused the victim, now age 30, since 2016.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

Although no legislation bars employers from discriminating against job applicants based on their HIV status, government guidelines for employers state that employees who are dismissed based on their medical status, including HIV-positive status, have grounds for wrongful dismissal claims against their employers. Many persons living with HIV were, however, afraid to disclose their status during the job application process and, during employment, feared dismissal if they were discovered to have made a false declaration.

The government discouraged discrimination, supported initiatives that countered misperceptions regarding HIV or AIDS, and publicly praised employers that welcomed workers with HIV or AIDS. HIV-positive foreigners, however, were barred from obtaining work permits, student visas, or immigrant visas.

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

Section 377A of the Penal Code criminalizes consensual male-male sexual conduct, subject to up to two years' imprisonment. Authorities have not enforced

this law since 2010 and have stated since then that they do not intend to do so. There were no indications the provision was used intentionally to intimidate or coerce. Its existence, however, intimidated some gay men, particularly those who were victims of sexual assault but would not report it to police for fear of being charged with violating Section 377A.

In January the Court of Appeal heard the appeal of three plaintiffs against a March 2020 High Court decision to dismiss a constitutional challenge to section 377A. In the hearing Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon declared that the 2007 political compromise to keep section 377A but not enforce it should be factored in when determining whether the law should be repealed. The court reserved judgment and a decision was pending as of October.

No laws explicitly protect the LGBTQI+ community from discrimination based on sexual orientation. Moreover, since single persons are prevented from purchasing government housing reserved for married couples until age 35 and same-sex marriage is not permitted, LGBTQI+ couples were unable to receive certain government services and benefits available to other citizens before reaching 35.

Same-sex partners were covered under the Protection from Harassment Act and enjoyed access to legal protections such as expedited protection orders in cases of harassment or violence, including by close and intimate partners.

LGBTQI+ persons experienced 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.

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

Critics remained concerned that media censorship resulted in underrepresentation of the LGBTQI+ community. In September, Heckin’ Unicorn, a local firm that sells pride products, maintains a blog, and supports LGBTQI+ initiatives, stated that in regulating media content with a classification system, the IMDA “through

its legally enforceable guidelines” played “a huge part in erasing LGBTQ+ voices in Singapore.” The IMDA censored films and television shows with LGBTQI+ themes. According to the IMDA website, authorities allow the broadcast of LGBTQI+ themes on television “as long as the presentation does not justify, promote, or glamorize such a lifestyle” (see section 2.a.).

In July police began to investigate a 23-year-old man who threatened violence against the LGBTQI+ community in a viral Instagram video and later issued him a 12-month conditional warning for criminal intimidation and intentionally causing alarm. Also in July police issued a two-year conditional warning to a man for harassing the staff of a restaurant in January and throwing at the staff a pride flag the shop had displayed.

The rights of transgender persons and the use of hormone therapy prompted a wider public debate after a transgender student accused the Ministry of Education in a January Reddit post of preventing her from beginning hormone replacement therapy and threatening to expel her from her all-boys school if she did not wear the boys’ uniform. Rejecting the accusations, the ministry stated it was in no position to interfere with a medical treatment and that the decisions lay with clinics and the parents in the case of minors. Several LGBTQI+ advocacy groups expressed solidarity with the student and declared that transgender persons faced violence and discrimination at home and in schools. This resulted in an unauthorized protest outside the ministry (see section 2.b.). In a parliamentary debate, then education minister Lawrence Wong cautioned that “issues of gender identity have become bitterly contested sources of division in the culture wars in some western countries and societies. We should not import these culture wars into Singapore or allow issues of gender identity to divide our society.”

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, with limits on union independence. 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. Refusal may occur when a trade union already exists in an industry or occupation. 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 the majority of affected unionized workers to vote in favor of a strike by secret ballot, as opposed to the majority 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.

The government effectively enforced applicable laws. Penalties were commensurate with those under other laws involving denial of civil rights, such as discrimination.

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

Almost all unions were affiliated with the National Trade Union Congress (hereafter trade union congress), an umbrella organization with a close relationship with the government and the ruling PAP. Trade union congress policy prohibited union members who supported opposition parties from holding office in its affiliated unions.

Collective bargaining was a routine part of labor-management relations in the private sector. Because nearly all unions were affiliates, the trade union congress 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 matters.

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 and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law does not define “forced labor,” but the government has accepted as law the definition found in International Labor Organization Convention 29. Under the law, destitute persons could be compelled to work if they resided in one of the 10 welfare homes managed by voluntary organizations as government agents, and if a medical and social assessment found them fit for work; no resident was forced to work under the relevant law during the year.

The government enforced the law, although it was more likely to prosecute employers for less serious charges than domestic servitude or bonded labor. Penalties included prison terms and fines, which were commensurate with those for analogous serious crimes, such as kidnapping. The government investigated fewer forced labor allegations in 2020 and received fewer reports due to COVID-19 but imposed fines on some employment agencies for illegal practices. In March the Ministry of Manpower charged three companies of the MES Group and its five directors with 553 counts of employment offenses, such as illegal employment of foreigners, excessive overtime hours, and making false salary declarations. The case continued as of October. In September the ministry arrested 18 persons for suspected illegal labor importation through a syndicate that obtained work passes through false declarations. In view of the number of low-paid foreign workers in the country, however, outside observers speculated that many cases of abuse continued to go undetected.

Practices indicative of forced labor, including 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 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 there were limited circumstances in which they may change employers without the consent of their employer.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits all the worst forms of child labor. The law prohibits employment of children younger than age 13. A child age 13 or older may engage in light, nonindustrial work, subject to medical clearance. Exceptions exist for family enterprises; a child 13 or older may work in such an industrial undertaking if it employs members of his or her family. Ministry of Manpower regulations prohibit night employment of children and restrict industrial work for children between ages 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. Employers who violated laws related to child labor were subject to fines, imprisonment, or both. Penalties were not commensurate with those for analogous serious crimes, such as kidnapping. 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, gender, race, religion, nationality, marital status, family responsibilities, disability, or medical condition.

In addition, the Ministry of Manpower's Fair Consideration Framework requires all companies to comply with the Guidelines of the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (guidelines), which cover procedures from recruitment to dismissal so that all employment practices are open, merit based, and nondiscriminatory. These guidelines call for eliminating language referring to age, race, gender, religion, nationality, marital status, family responsibilities, and disability in employment advertisements and prohibit questions on family status during a job interview. 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 of Manpower. No government guidelines explicitly recommend against discrimination with respect to political opinion, sexual orientation, or HIV or other communicable disease status. Companies found guilty of discrimination may not hire foreigners for at least 12 months and also may not renew work passes of existing foreign workers.

The government effectively enforced the guidelines. Penalties were not commensurate with those under other laws related to civil rights but had a deterrent effect.

The government supported flexible work policies, although no laws mandate it, and subsidized childcare.

The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices received and investigated complaints of employment discrimination. As of October the Ministry of Manpower had placed 400 companies on a watch list for potential discriminatory hiring practices. In the past three years, the alliance investigated an

approximate annual average of 400 cases of possible workplace discrimination with 60 percent involving discrimination based on nationality, according to the Ministry of Manpower. In August the alliance announced it was investigating video-game developer Ubisoft for claims of sexual harassment and workplace discrimination.

The Council for Board Diversity reported that as of June, women's representation on boards of the largest 100 companies listed on the Singapore Exchange increased to 18 percent, slightly more than the previous year. Representation of women also increased on statutory boards but declined on registered NGOs and charities. The country's adjusted gender pay gap was 6 percent as of the most recent data in 2018, but occupational segregation continued.

Some ethnic Malays and Indians reported that discrimination limited their employment and promotion opportunities. Malays were prohibited from holding certain sensitive national security positions in the military.

There were also some reports of discrimination based on disability, pregnancy, and sexual orientation or 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

Wage and Hour Laws: The law does not specify a national minimum wage for all sectors. The government, in consultation with unions and employers, has a progressive wage model (PWM), which sets wage floors and skills requirements for specific positions in cleaning, landscaping, elevator maintenance, and security services sectors. Employers must follow these pay scales as a requirement to obtain a business license. The government did not have an official poverty line, but an October 2020 report by the National University of Singapore found that 12.5 percent of all households (PWM and non-PWM) had incomes below the absolute poverty line.

The law sets the standard legal workweek at 44 hours and 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. Workplace protection, including paid sick leave, mandatory annual leave, and protection against wrongful dismissal, is available to all private-sector employees except domestic workers and seafarers who are covered under separate laws. Foreign domestic workers must receive one rest day per week. The law also mandates benefits for part-time employees, defined as those working 35 hours per week or less. The government effectively enforced wage floor and overtime laws; penalties were lower than those for similar crimes, such as fraud.

Occupational Safety and Health: 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. The law provides employees with the right to remove themselves if they are threatened by a danger not agreed to in the contract. Inspectors have the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions.

The Ministry of Manpower effectively enforced laws and regulations establishing working conditions and comprehensive occupational safety and health regulations. The government took action against employers for workplace violations, including for nonpayment of salaries, serious safety violations, and abuse or mistreatment of foreign domestic workers. Penalties for violating these regulations – fines and stop-work orders – were commensurate with those for similar crimes. The number of inspectors was sufficient to enforce compliance.

The Ministry of Manpower continued to promote training to reduce the frequency of job-related accidents in high-risk sectors such as construction, and authorities provided tax incentives to firms that introduced hazard control measures. Workplace fatalities in 2020 were the lowest since 2004, when statistics first became publicly available, with 30 recorded deaths (0.9 per 100,000 workers). Nonfatal major injuries decreased by 26 percent to 463 cases (14 per 100,000 workers). The total number of workplace injuries fell by 18 percent from 13,779 injuries in 2019 to 11,350 in 2020, largely due to work suspensions during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the ministry noted an escalating injury rate in late 2020 and a spate of accidents during the year, with 23 workplace fatalities in the

first six months. Between December 2020 and mid-March, the ministry conducted more than 1,000 work site inspections, issued 13 stop-work orders, and fined 264 companies a total of S\$303,000 (\$221,000). In 2020 the government issued 28 stop-work orders for workplace safety violations with an average duration of eight weeks and fined 558 companies a total of S\$877,000 (\$641,000), a significant decrease compared with 2019 due to COVID-19 restrictions. The government also enforced requirements for employers to provide one rest day per week or compensation for foreign domestic workers.

In March the minister of manpower formed an inquiry committee to investigate the causes and circumstances that led to a fatal explosion and fire at Stars Engrg Pte Ltd on February 24 that killed three workers and injured another seven.

In August a court sentenced Muhammed Noredzuan Bin Othman to four months' imprisonment under the Workplace Safety and Health Act for failing to perform required procedures, negligence that resulted in the death of welder Chin Chee Cheng. The government also issued fines and penalties and closed businesses for noncompliance by employees with temporary COVID-19 safe-distancing measures.

The law incentivizes companies to prevent workplace injuries by permitting employers with better safety records to pay lower insurance premiums, expedites the benefit claim process for workers, and increases the size of benefit payouts to injured workers.

The Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management, which includes the Ministry of Manpower, unions, and the employers' federation, offered advice and mediation services to help employees and employers to manage employment disputes. The alliance 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.

Most foreign workers were concentrated in low-wage, low-skill jobs in construction, shipbuilding, services, and domestic work and were often required to work long hours. After widespread criticism of living conditions in purpose-built dormitories housing approximately 323,000 migrant workers following a 2020

COVID-19 outbreak in the dormitories, the government announced improved standards for new dormitories in September. Maximum occupancy per room for new structures is 12 persons, each room must have one en-suite toilet per six residents, and minimum living space is increased to 45 square feet per resident. The new dormitories must also include Wi-Fi and fans in the dormitory rooms and one exhaust fan per toilet. Following the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak in the dormitories, migrant workers' freedom of movement continued to be restricted under temporary COVID-19 legislation and remained significantly more limited and controlled than for the rest of the population. These restrictions were gradually eased in September under a pilot project that allowed up to 500 migrant workers per week to visit pre-identified community locations for six hours if they were fully vaccinated and their dormitories met specific requirements. All workers were also allowed to visit recreation centers up to twice a week, and all vaccinated workers could join excursions to local attractions.

In December 2020 a construction worker sued his employer, V Spec Engineering & Supplies, and dormitory operator Joylicious Management, for being forcibly locked up with approximately 20 other migrant workers for 43 hours in April 2020 after a roommate tested positive for COVID-19. The Ministry of Manpower had previously issued a stern warning to Joylicious Management and put a hiring freeze on V Spec in April 2020.

NGOs advocated for structural changes to the work permit employment system in order to reduce the financial vulnerability and potential for exploitation of such workers.

The majority of foreign domestic workers, mainly from the Philippines and Indonesia, worked under clearly outlined contracts. Certain offenses, such as causing hurt or insulting the modesty of a foreign domestic worker, have significantly higher penalties than for other foreign workers. There were reports of employers abusing or mistreating such workers (see section 7.b.).

Throughout the year the government investigated and sentenced several employers for abuse of their foreign domestic workers. In June a woman was sentenced to 30 years in prison for starving, torturing, and ultimately killing her domestic worker from Burma. The conviction represented the longest jail term handed out for the

abuse of a domestic worker in the country's history.

In response, the Ministry of Manpower in July announced measures to strengthen support for foreign domestic workers and better detect signs of abuse, including medical examinations by doctors without the employer present. Employment agencies were required to conduct post-placement checks of foreign domestic workers. In April the Ministry of Manpower began random house visits to check on domestic workers' working and living conditions and advise them on avenues to seek assistance. Working with the Centre for Domestic Employees, the ministry expanded its interviews to cover all first-time domestic workers by year's end. As of December employment agencies of foreign domestic workers were required to conduct at least one check on newly hired workers and their employers either via phone or in person within the first three months to ensure the well-being of the worker.