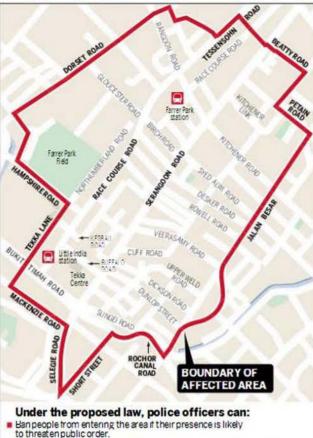
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Keeping Little India safe

Police officers may get more powers in Little India for up to one year. according to new legislation proposed in Parliament on Monday



- Search and interview anyone within the area tor prohibited items such as weapons or explosives and alcohol.
 Search and enter premises in the area without a warrant if they reasonably suspect that alcohol has been drunk, prohibited items are being kept or a banned person is being harboured on the premises. Police others investigating arrestable offences can already conduct searches without a warrant under certain conditions under the Criminal Procedure Code.
- Quickly cancel or suspend business licences whether for hotels, restaurants or entert animent outlets if the licensees are suspected to have flouted the new law. Source: MHA

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BAD IMAGE

Even innocent people will not be very comfortable about coming to Little India. - Little India Shopkeepers and Heritage Association vice-chairman Gohulabalan Sundaresan, on how the new Bill may affect businesses

The new powers... could be seen as being directed at ... Indian foreign workers ... It is important to guard against this. - Tampines GRCMP Irene Ng, on implementation of the Bill

STEREOTYPING OF WORKERS

Opinion divided over Little **India Bill**

Some worry extra steps could lead to stereotyping and hurt businesses in area

By FENG ZENGKUN

police extra, temporary powers in Little India to keep it safe after the Dec 8 riot has drawn divided opinions. A BILL tabled in Parliament on Monday to give the

Some noted that the new temporary law was necessary to maintain security, especially since a high-level Committee of Inquiry convened to look into the causes of riot has not completed its work.

But others wondered whether such provisions are still necessary, given that measures such as a ban on drinking alcohol in public places on week-ends seem to have established order in the area.

Others also worry that the law may unfairly penalise foreign workers who gather in the area on weekends, lead to stereotyping of the workers and further erode business there.

The proposed law – expected to last for up to a year until longer-term measures are enacted – al-

year until longer-term measures are enacted - ai-lows the police to ban people from Little India for up to 30 days and quickly suspend the business li-cences of those suspected of flouting the law. While police officers investigating "arrestable of -fences" can already conduct searches without war-rants under the Criminal Procedure Code, the new law specifies that they can also do so in Little India under catain conditions under certain conditions.

It enables the police to search and enter premis-es in Little India if they suspect alcohol has been consumed, prohibited items kept or banned people harboured. They can also strip-search and inter-view people there for alcohol and prohibited items such as weapons and explosives

such as weapons and explosives. "However harsh the enforcement powers and measures in the new Bill may seem at first glance, they are not new," said Singapore Management Uni-versity (SMU) associate professor of law S. Chandra Mohan. This is because the Public Order (Preserva-tion) Act (POPA) has already been invoked in the Little India area, which gives the Government very wide powers. "The POPA contains a lot more extensive enforcement powers and measures, such as the ability to impose a curfew in the area."

As Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean ex-plained, the proposed law tabled in Parliament now restricts these wide powers by "scoping them more tightly

But others have noted that even these restricted

powers may not be necessary. "The measures we have used since Dec 8 have maintained law and order relatively wellby most ac-counts, and the Government has also said that, by

and large, the foreign workers here are law-abiding," said Nominated MP Eugene Tan, who is also an SMU law academic.

Little India Shopkeepers and Heritage Associa-tion vice-chairman S Gohulabalan said shopkeepers in the area were "very fearful" that the proposed law would keep people away from the area, hurting businesses

He said the search powers were more appropri-ate for gambling areas and vice dens. "Even innocent people will not be very comfortable about com-

ing to Little India." Tampines GRC MP Irene Ng added that since the proposed law is limited to Little India, "the new powers for interrogating, searching and banning people from Little India could be seen as being di rected at... Indian foreign workers", only some of whom were involved in the riot.

"It is important to guard against this, and I am assured by DPM Teo's reply that (the law's) imple-mentation would be fair."

But she added that the new law would also allow the police to enforce temporary precautionary measures, particularly the restrictions on alcohol sale, until the Committee of Inquiry into the riot makes its recommendations. zengkun@sph.com.sg