

**SINGAPORE SOCIETY**

# Govt looks after needs, aspirations: Shanmugam

*But there will always be constraints and trade-offs are sometimes inevitable, he says*

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**SINGAPORE** – Unlike in some other countries where political parties are clearly aligned with specific groups in society, the Government here looks after not just the needs of all the people but their aspirations as well, Law and Foreign Affairs Minister K Shanmugam assured yesterday.

And while this means that trade-offs are sometimes inevitable, the Government will explain what those

constraints are, he noted.

Mr Shanmugam said: “Any honest government should address the aspirations and needs of all sectors of society. Of course, in many Western democracies, parties are clearly identified with specific segments. Conservatives, or even democrats ... their policies are geared towards different segments of the population. Even though they would go to elections and say, ‘this is for the entire country.’”

He reiterated that the Singapore Government’s approach “has always been to look at the interest of all interest groups, then look at the trade-offs ... and put in policies that work for the entire country and all the people — which must mean there have to be trade-offs”.

“But there must also be benefits for all. So, we have to meet the aspirations. There are always constraints and we will then explain clearly what those constraints are.”

Mr Shanmugam, who was speaking on the sidelines of the opening of the Chong Pang Social Service Hub, was responding to TODAY’s questions on how far the Government should go in helping the middle class and whether there should be a distinction between addressing needs and aspirations.

These questions came up for discussion last Thursday on VoicesTODAY, this newspaper’s weekly talk show on MediaCorp TV’s Channel 5, with the callers divided on how the Budget could have better addressed the needs

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of the sandwiched class.

While some felt that the Government should focus on the lower income and the middle class should stand on their own two feet, others said the Government should help those sandwiched between caring for children and for the elderly.

Some also felt the housing policy should take into consideration upper middle income young professionals — a group whose income would bust the ceiling for a new HDB flat but who felt that a condominium was out of reach.

The issue of aspirations also came into sharp focus after an announcement last Monday — separate from the Budget — on new car loan restrictions, which raised the down payment on cars and reduced the maximum loan tenure.

Members of Parliament (MPs) TODAY spoke to felt it was time to temper a “hire-purchase culture”.

Aspirations also have to be “right-sized” and “contextualised”, as Nominated MP Eugene Tan put it.

Assistant Professor Tan noted that in a mature economy, people have “aspirational needs” — such as cars — and “post-material aspirations” such as better work-life balance or freedom of speech.

“The Government has to right-size these aspirations, while we need to contextualise our aspirations.

“Constraints are something that most people forget. In built-up cities like London and New York, most people do not own a car,” he said.

Marine Parade GRC MP Seah Ki-



**VIDEO GOVT WILL STRIVE TO MEET ASPIRATIONS OF ALL SECTORS OF SOCIETY: SHANMUGAM**  
 Scan the QR code using the reader app on your smartphone, or you can visit <http://tdy.sg/vidgovt4march> for the video.

### SHANMUGAM REITERATES NEED TO STRENGTHEN LAWS ON ANIMAL ABUSE

● Welcoming the recommendations put up by a committee last Friday, Law and Foreign Affairs Minister K Shanmugam reiterated the need to “strengthen the legislation and deal more effectively with animal abuse”.

There is also a need to “put in place norms (and) frameworks for better, more responsible ownership of pets and the pet industry”, he said.

Mr Shanmugam’s ward, Chong Pang,

had previously organised two animal welfare forums. Suggestions made at these forums were submitted to the relevant agencies. Chong Pang was also the first constituency to start a trial for cat ownership in HDB flats last year.

In January, two kittens were found dismembered outside a HDB flat in the ward.

The Animal Welfare Legislation Review Committee was formed last year to look into how to better protect animals in the light of continued abuse cases.

Its recommendations include harsher penalties for animal abuse, a minimum age and pre-sale screening for pet buyers.

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an Peng added: “We aspire for many things — better jobs, better homes, bigger and better cars.

“In the entire spectrum, there are some things (that are) more important than others. Housing, for instance, as we need to bring up our families.”

Meanwhile, Mr Shanmugam said the Chong Pang Social Service Hub could be replicated in other constituencies if it is a success.

The integrated centre was started by Thye Hwa Kwan Moral Charities and the ward’s grassroots leaders.

It aims to promote active ageing by centralising all elderly services such as health and fall risk screenings, as well as provision of free meals.

Collaborating with Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, the centre’s trained staff will also refer elderly with urgent medical conditions to the hospital.