

Parliamentary Reply by DPM Teo Chee Hean on programmes by OSU

TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF SINGAPORE
WRITTEN ANSWERS
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PROGRAMMES BY OVERSEAS SINGAPOREAN UNIT (OSU) (Effectiveness of Programmes)

Dr Lim Wee Kiak: To ask the Prime Minister over the past five years (a) how many overseas Singaporeans has the Overseas Singaporean Unit (OSU) reached out to; (b) what are the achievements of OSU; (c) how much resources have been utilised by OSU; and (d) how have these resources been allocated.

Mr Sitoh Yih Pin: To ask the Prime Minister what is the rationale behind the S\$4 million expenditure on Singapore Day 2012 held recently in New York.

Mr Teo Chee Hean (for the Prime Minister):

Since 2003, the overseas Singaporean population has increased from 157,000 to about 195,000 as at December 2011. Overseas Singaporeans are an integral part of the Singapore family. While we work to sustain our population through supporting marriage and parenthood and welcoming suitable immigrants, it is also essential that we engage our Singaporeans overseas. They are part of our family while overseas and the valuable skills and exposure they gain will enrich our economy and society when they return.

The Overseas Singaporean Unit, OSU in short, was set up in 2006 to coordinate whole-of-Government efforts to engage Singaporeans abroad. It runs face-to-face and online programmes to meet the needs of Singaporeans around the world to inform them of developments in Singapore, and keep them emotionally connected with Singapore.

Through OSU's programmes, we have engaged more than 90,000 Singaporeans over the past five years. Based on post-event surveys, more than 80% of those who attended OSU's events agreed that these have achieved the objectives of updating them about developments in Singapore and brought the overseas Singaporean community closer together.

OSU also has a mailing list of more than 56,000 Singaporeans which it regularly engages through electronic bulletins and relevant publications. This mailing list is also a useful channel to send out important notices or emergency advisories to them. For example, OSU assisted the Elections Department to remind Singaporeans to register as overseas voters for the last General and Presidential Elections. During the twin disasters in Japan in March 2011 and the severe floods in Australia in January 2011, OSU assisted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to send out emergency advisories to Singaporeans residing in the affected regions.

OSU also supports ground-up initiatives by some 280 Singaporean clubs and student associations in over 120 cities and provides seed funding to organise activities such as National Day or festive celebrations.

OSU's on-line Overseas Singaporean Portal has a healthy monthly unique visitor-ship of more than 44,000.

Singapore Day is a major engagement platform that reaches out to a large number of Singaporeans across a broad spectrum. Since the first Singapore Day in 2007, the event has

reached out to 40,000 Singaporeans. This constitutes almost half of the 90,000 Singaporeans that have come forward to attend OSU's engagement events.

The objectives of Singapore Day are three-fold: to provide updates on developments back home, strengthen emotional connections and galvanise the overseas Singaporean community. Singapore Day does this through its three key components of local food, familiar performances and a Singapore showcase highlighting the latest developments in the economic, social and cultural sectors. The Singapore showcase provides important updates for Singaporeans coming home, such as job opportunities, education and national service for their children.

Singapore Day 2012 attracted 4,900 Singaporeans, their family members and loved ones, half of whom came from outside of New York State. Even coming from upstate New York involves at least a half-day road journey by coach or car. They came at their own expense. Some even flew in from the West Coast and Canada. I am glad that, as we made considerable efforts to reach out to Singaporeans in North America, they too made considerable efforts to be there for Singapore Day.

This mutual effort to reach out to be together, in itself speaks volumes. An onsite survey showed that close to half expressed their pride in being Singaporean. Over 70% felt nostalgia for home.

Over 90% agreed that Singapore Day successfully galvanised the overseas Singaporean community. Ser Zhang, a Singaporean student studying at Cornell University said in his blog that the event "remind(ed) the overseas Singaporean community that they're still valued and cared for and Singapore still has a place for us."

About 60% of the Singapore Day budget this year went into the three main components that directly engage participants. The remainder went into logistics, transportation and onsite services essential for the safe and smooth conduct of the event. About 12% of these costs were offset by sponsorship from private sector partners.

While we strive to make Singapore the best home for our citizens, we know that with globalisation, Singaporeans will continue to venture abroad for various reasons. As such, keeping overseas Singaporeans connected with home is one important pillar of our population strategy to sustain a strong citizen core. Over the last five years, the Government has set aside about S\$7 million annually to fund engagement programmes by OSU and other government agencies, including supporting overseas Singaporean clubs, talks by prominent Singaporeans including businessmen, and artists. OSU will continue to review, on a regular basis, the effectiveness of its programmes and ensure fiscal prudence in achieving its mission.