

SINGAPORE

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SINGAPORE

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Part 1: Overview of Singapore

A. Country Background

Singapore Facts ^{1,2}	
Geographical size	719.9 sq km
Population ³	5,612,300
Ethnic breakdown ⁴	Main ethnic groups: Chinese (76.4%) Malay (15.2%) Indian (7.3%) Other (1.2%)
Official language(s)	English (working language) Malay (national language) Chinese Tamil
Literary rate (aged 15 years and above)	97.2%
Life expectancy	83.1
GDP	SG\$447,283,500 (per capita SG\$79,697)
Government	Republic with a unicameral Westminster parliamentary system of government, but with no clear demarcation between the executive and legislative branches.
Political and social situation	'Soft authoritarian' form of governance which marginalised rights protection in early years although elections have been held regularly since 1948 with voting made compulsory in 1959. In January 2016, the government amended its Constitution to allow only Malay candidates to run for the presidency. ⁵ Of several candidates, only one met all the qualifications. In September 2017, Mdm Halimah Yacob became Singapore's first female president in the third of five presidential elections without contest.

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¹ Figures relate to 2017 unless otherwise stated.

² Information has been taken from the Department of Statistics Singapore, available at <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/whats-new/advance-release-calendar>, accessed on 10 June 2018.

³ The total population comprises both Singapore residents and non-residents.

⁴ 'Population in brief 2017' Strategy Group, Prime Minister's Office, Department of Statistics Singapore, September 2017, available at <https://www.strategygroup.gov.sg/docs/default-source/.../population-in-brief-2017.pdf>, accessed on 10 June 2018.

⁵ 'Presidential election 2017' available at <http://www.singapore-elections.com/presidential-election/2017>, accessed on 10 June 2018.

Economic progress^{6,7,8}

The most developed ASEAN nation in terms of economic development, Singapore had a reported GDP per capita of US\$57,714 in 2016, similar to that of Denmark (US\$53,578) and Sweden (US\$51,844) based on data provided by the World Bank. Through the provision of high-quality education and high literacy rates, developed sea ports, and a booming financial sector, the city-state has long established its reputation as a global hub inside and outside ASEAN. Furthermore, with a median age of 34.6, Singapore is among the very few highly-developed countries with a relatively young population, almost twice as young as Monaco's population, a European city-state.⁹ As a result, in 2017, Singapore was globally ranked second in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index based on various indicators, such as starting a business, acquiring construction permits, registering property, trading across borders, and labour market regulation.¹⁰ However, despite its continuing economic success, human rights violations have increasingly been observed by civil society organizations. Accordingly, as it takes over the ASEAN chairmanship in 2018, the government faces clear challenges and opportunities ahead.

Political and social situation

While in recent years, Singapore's social situation has shown significant progress for its populace, 2017 saw a drastic change in its political situation due to tighter restrictions on public assemblies and the freedom of speech, both of which deteriorated following amendments to Singapore's Public Order Act.¹¹ At the same time, more limitations were placed upon both foreigners living in the country to participate in public gatherings and foreign-funded media sources.¹² As part of this development, the government-sanctioned Speakers' Corner allows only Singapore citizens to hold public speeches without a licence or police permit, further tightening its control of such activities. The main reasons stated by the Singaporean government for these restrictions was to maintain social and religious harmony, and national and public interest. As such, being a culturally diverse nation, the government continues to maintain a tight grip on any activities threatening the peaceful cohabitation of its main ethnicities (Chinese, Malay, and Tamil) and smaller minority groups, e.g. the local LGBTIQ community for

⁶ 'Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Recent activities' Singapore Government, available at <https://www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/overseasmission/asean.html>, accessed on 12 June 2018.

⁷ 'Singapore' Invest in ASEAN, available at <http://investasean.asean.org/index.php/page/view/asean-member-states/view/709/newsid/788/singapore.html>, accessed on 12 June 2018.

⁸ 'GDP per capita (current US\$)' The World Bank, available at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?view=map&year_high_desc=false, accessed on 12 June 2018.

⁹ 'The World Factbook' Central Intelligence Agency, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sn.html>, accessed on 12 June 2018.

¹⁰ 'Doing business' The World Bank, available at <http://www.doingbusiness.org/rankings>, accessed 14 June 2018.

¹¹ 'Singapore: Authorities given broad new powers to police protests' Amnesty International, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/04/singapore-authorities-given-broad-new-powers-to-police-protests/>, accessed on 11 June 2018.

¹² 'Singapore: Events of 2017' Human Rights Watch, available at <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/singapore>, accessed on 11 June 2018.

which the Pink Dot 2017 event (that aimed to raise awareness of and acceptance for the group) was accessible to citizens only. Regular surveillance of social media and an increase in arrests at peaceful assemblies, e.g. of Singaporean activist, Jolovan Wham, also comprise significant developments in 2017.

Simultaneously, an increase in defamation lawsuits by government officials against the public and the opposition was seen in 2017. For example, siblings and a nephew of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who criticised the government, were charged over allegations made against Singapore's founding father and deceased leader, Lee Kuan Yew. In August that same year, the government initiated court proceedings against Lee's nephew, Li Shengwu, for private Facebook posts criticising the government's "pliant court system." Several requests by the government for an apology were rejected by Li Shengwu who currently lives abroad.

Moreover, in a controversial move, the government made use of a law allowing it to deprive naturalized citizens of citizenship. In December 2017, the government revoked the citizenship of naturalized citizen, Gaye Alassane, following accusations of match-fixing (a criminal offence under Art 133(1) of the Constitution).¹³

The 2017 presidential elections saw an unprecedented move by the government to be more inclusive of minority groups. As such, it amended its Constitution to allow only candidates of certain ethnic communities to run for the presidency. Upon enforcement, it was decided only candidates from the Malay community should be permitted to stand – however, only one candidate was deemed eligible in 2017, thus, negating the need for an election. As the first female and second Malay president in the country's history, Mdm Halimah Yacob became the city-state's president effectively because no candidate was deemed eligible to stand against her. However, the amendment is somewhat controversial with several members of parliament calling it unconstitutional.

As one of ASEAN's economic powerhouses, the government also was keen to maintain a focus on political and economic stability; as a result, civil rights were often overruled. As chair of ASEAN in 2018, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced the country's aspiration to "promote and uphold a rules-based regional order," and that ASEAN was a "lifeboat" for its 10 member states, ensuring regional stability and prosperity.¹⁴

¹³ Noor Farhan, 'What next for former S-League footballer, Gaye Alassane?' Channel News Asia, 7 December 2017, available at <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/sport/what-next-for-former-s-league-footballer-gaye-alassane-9477942>, accessed on 14 June 2018.

¹⁴ Lian Buan, 'Singapore's ASEAN 2018 chairmanship to focus on 'resilience and innovation' Rappler, 15 November 2017, available at <https://www.rappler.com/world/regions/asia-pacific/188530-singapore-lee-hsien-loong-speech-closing-ceremony-asean>, accessed on 11 June 2018.

B. International Human Rights Commitments and Obligations

Singapore's ratification of major international human rights instruments extended beyond the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD), with its recent ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) in November 2017, as can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Ratification Status of International Instruments - Singapore¹⁵

Treaty	Signature Date	Ratification Date, Accession (a), Succession (d) Date
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Punishment (CAT)		
Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture		
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)		
Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming to the abolition of the death penalty		
Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED)		
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)		5 Oct 1995 (a)
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)	19 Oct 2015	27 Nov 2017
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)		
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMW)		
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)		5 Oct 1995 (a)
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict	7 Sep 2000	11 Dec 2008
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography		

¹⁵ 'Ratification status for Singapore' United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, available at http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=157&Lang=EN, accessed on 10 June 2018.

Treaty	Signature Date	Ratification Date, Accession (a), Succession (d) Date
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)		18 Jul 2013

The country continues to hold reservations towards major international human rights instruments, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Punishment (CAT), the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED), and the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMW). Singapore's negative stance towards the ICCPR and the ICESCR can be traced back to its stance on freedom of speech, assembly, and other civilian rights which have deteriorated since 2017.

CAT: Singapore's reservations mostly revolve around the establishment of an independent body (the Committee against Torture) which may consider interstate and individual allegations of torture and other inhuman or degrading punishments.

ICMW: Non-ratification is justified by the perceived disconnect between Singapore's national interests and migrant rights and state duties as described in the ICMW. Singapore's commitment towards the re-structuring of non-compliant immigration policies to acknowledge, respect, and protect migrant worker rights has therefore been challenged by the ICMW.¹⁶

Singapore has also not signed or ratified any of the optional protocols, including the Optional Protocol of CAT, the Optional Protocol to CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the Second Optional Protocol to ICCPR which aims to abolish the death penalty. While the latter can be explained by the country's upholding of capital punishment, reservations to other protocols mostly revolve around the city-state's fear that such commitments may impact negatively on its sovereignty.

Developments in 2017

ICERD: Having signed in 2015, Singapore eventually ratified the convention on 27 November 2017. The ratification was a logical step since it aligns with the city-state's permanent mission to maintain peace and harmony among its heterogeneous population, which, aside from the four main ethnic communities, is home to many smaller minor ethnicities. However, Singapore's reservation to the Convention made

¹⁶ Su, Z, 'National interests and migrants' rights: The non-ratification of the ICMW by Singapore and Canada' MigrantWorkersRights, available at <http://www.migrantworkersrights.net/tl/resources/national-interests-and-migrants-rights-the-non-rati>, accessed on 11 June 2018.

in 1965 must be noted, for example with regards to Arts 2 and 22. Article 2 “reserves the right to apply its policies concerning the admission and regulation of foreign work pass holders, with a view to promoting integration and maintaining cohesion within its racially diverse society” and Art 22 “states that before any dispute to which the Republic of Singapore is a party may be submitted to the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice under this Article, the specific consent of the Republic of Singapore is required in each case.”¹⁷ ICERD ratification aside, there were no visible positive human rights developments in the country in 2017.

C. National Laws Affecting Human Rights

*Part X on Citizenship*¹⁸

Part X of the Constitution defines the requirements and rights of persons to obtain and maintain citizenship as Singaporean nationals. However, the government also preserves the right to deprive and cancel such citizenship, effectively rendering these individuals stateless. This is in direct violation of the right to nationality as stated by the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner.¹⁹ The past years have seen both an increase in government threats to deprive individuals of their citizenship and active discrimination against non-Singaporeans.

Article 129(3)(a)(i) (deprivation of citizenship): This article states that “The Government may, by order, deprive of his citizenship any person who is a citizen of Singapore by naturalisation if the Government is satisfied that he has shown himself by act or speech to be disloyal or disaffected towards Singapore.” This is a blatant attack on the freedom of speech as the government can at any point deprive individuals of their citizenship.

Article 130 (deprivation of citizenship of the child of a person losing citizenship): Based on Art 129, Singapore also holds the right to deprive the children of those losing Singaporean nationality of their citizenship: “... the Government may, by order, deprive of his citizenship any child of that person under the age of 21 years who has been registered as a citizen of Singapore pursuant to this Constitution and was so registered as being the child of that person or of that person’s wife or husband.”

Article 135(1)(c)(i) (deprivation of citizenship following exercise of the right of foreign nationals to live abroad): The government “may, by order, deprive a citizen of Singapore of his citizenship if the Government is satisfied that he is of or over the age of 18 years

¹⁷ United Nations Treaty Collection, available at https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtmsg_no=IV-2&chapter=4&clang=_en#EndDec, accessed on 17 June 2018.

¹⁸ Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, available at <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/CONS1963>, accessed on 20 June 2018.

¹⁹ ‘Right to a nationality and statelessness’ OHCHR, available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/Nationality.aspx>, accessed on 20 June 2018.

and has, whether before or after attaining the age of 18 years, been ordinarily resident outside Singapore for a continuous period of 10 years (including any period of residence outside Singapore before 2nd January 1986) and has not at any time during that period or thereafter entered Singapore by virtue of a certificate of status or travel document issued by the competent authorities of Singapore.”

Vulnerable Adults Act: This Act²⁰ aims to protect mentally and physically disabled persons and the elderly from abuse. First announced in 2014 by Singapore’s Ministry of Social and Family Development, it will be implemented in 2018. The Vulnerable Adults Act was initiated after several incidents including the abuse and torture of a mentally disabled woman and an elderly disabled man, leading to the death of the former. Implementation of this law will involve the collaboration of several ministries and agencies including charities, hospital, and courts.²¹

Mediation Act: Passed by Parliament in early 2017 and entering into force on November 2017, this Act allows conflicting parties to enter into a process of mediation to settle disputes, and recognizes such settlements as if they were court judgments. Further, the Act is currently enforceable in at least 38 countries, either under the 2005 Hague Convention or specific Commonwealth countries referred to under the Reciprocal Enforcement of Commonwealth Judgments Act.²² This mechanism serves as a tool for dispute resolution whilst also offering a clear legislative framework to safeguard the confidentiality and enforceability of mediation agreements.²³

National rape law amendments: In *Ng Kean Meng Terence v Public Prosecutor*, a Singaporean court recently updated its rape sentencing framework. In opposition to the old framework which was laid down in *Public Prosecutor v NF* (2007), a two-step sentencing band was introduced, consisting of offence classifications based on different types of rape and the calibration of appropriate sentences. This new law enables courts to both identify and sentence different rape cases more effectively, thereby providing much needed clarity and coherence to Singapore’s rape laws which will lead to improved justice for victims.²⁴

²⁰ Goy, P, ‘New laws to protect the weak’ *The Straits Times*, 30 December 2016, available at <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/new-laws-to-protect-the-weak>, accessed on 11 June 2018.

²¹ Tan, T, ‘2017 year-ender: Keeping vulnerable adults safe from abuse’ *The Straits Times*, 29 December 2017, available at <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/keeping-vulnerable-adults-safe-from-abuse>, accessed on 11 June 2018.

²² Sim, C, ‘The international reach of the Singapore Mediation Act’ *Kluwer Mediation Blog*, 17 December 2017, available at <http://mediationblog.kluwerarbitration.com/2017/12/17/international-reach-singapore-mediation-act/>, accessed on 20 June 2018.

²³ ‘Summary of Mediation Act’ *Straits Law*, 14 June 2017, available at <http://straitslaw.com.sg/summary-mediation-act/>, accessed on 20 June 2018.

²⁴ ‘Rape’ *Gloria James-Civetta & Co*, available at <https://www.singaporecriminallawyer.com/rape/>, accessed on 20 June 2018.

D. National Laws Threatening Human Rights^{25,26,27}

Monitoring of telephones and other private communications

In its efforts to build a “Smart Nation” and initiate a technology revolution, the city-state has made significant changes to some of its laws. Various legal frameworks have been amended, including the Privacy Law, Copyright Law, Patent Law, Competition Law, and Cybersecurity Law.

Privacy Law

The Privacy Law aims to give companies more access to private data in order to carry out big data analyses of individuals’ data without the need for consent, and as such, directly clashes with Singapore’s Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) of 2012,²⁸ which seeks to protect citizens’ data. Since Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced Singapore’s aspiration to become the world’s leading tech-country, several proposals were made to amend the PDPA in favour of realising an effective Privacy Law.

Freedom of expression in the press and online

In a recent crackdown on political and social unrest, the government introduced several laws on sedition, contempt, and public order. For example, the Administration of Justice (Protection) Act came into effect on October 2017 forbidding any attempt to “scandalis[e] the judiciary,” hence criminalising any discussion of pending court proceedings. Further, the Act’s restrictions are very broad leading to uncertainty as to what can or cannot be said. Moreover, Singapore has made increasing use of its sedition laws to combat certain speech on race, religion, and criticism of the government itself.

Public Order Act

Throughout 2017, application of this Act has seen a visible increase. Whilst mostly covering public assembly, it also includes the handing out of leaflets considered to be hurtful to different races and religions. In severe cases, the government retains its right to seek capital punishment. Additionally, public assemblies are regulated by a requirement to obtain a police permit beforehand. Moreover, in many instances such as the Speakers’ Corner in Hong Lim Park, only Singaporean citizens are permitted to assemble, severely restricting the rights of non-citizens, residents, and non-residents, ostensibly to ensure national political discourse will not be influenced by foreigners and foreign interests. Likewise, in mid-2017, the government amended the Public Order

²⁵ ‘Singapore 2017 Human Rights Report’ United States Department of State, available at <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/277359.pdf>, accessed on 21 June 2018.

²⁶ ‘Singapore’ Human Rights Watch, available at <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/singapore#07310e>, accessed on 10 June 2018.

²⁷ ‘Kill the chicken to scare the monkeys’ Human Rights Watch, available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/12/12/kill-chicken-scare-monkeys/suppression-free-expression-and-assembly-singapore>, accessed on 15 June 2018.

²⁸ ‘Data protection laws of the world: Singapore’ DLA Piper, available at <https://www.dlapiperdataprotection.com/index.html?t=law&c=SG>, accessed on 21 June 2018.

Act, giving authority to the Police Commissioner to deny permits, further limiting the freedom of speech and assembly of both Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans. Also, in April 2017, the Act was specifically amended to authorise the Police Commissioner to deny permits for “cause-related” assemblies if non-citizens are involved in any way.²⁹

Newspaper and Printing Presses Act

While not a new law, the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPPA) continues to limit media freedom despite the fact most media outlets are already closely aligned to the government. As such, both foreign and local newspapers require a yearly licence to be issued by Singaporean authorities. Moreover, such licences are also a prerequisite for high traffic websites which are again closely monitored.

*Defamation Law*³⁰

To silence its critics, the government made extensive use of its defamation laws against civilians in 2017. As such, cases of politicians suing both Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans saw an unprecedented increase. The government was even prepared to sue certain family members of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong for accusing him of influencing the country’s political agenda for his own benefit, and disrespecting their late father’s wish of demolishing his house upon his death. In a widely discussed and public case, the Prime Minister eventually decided not to pursue his family for the allegations made, explaining that it would have caused unnecessary damage to the country.

LGBTIQ-related rights

Under s.377a of the Penal Code, Singapore criminalised the act of men engaging in sexual intercourse with men. Even though this law has yet to be enforced, it nonetheless demonstrates the government’s stance on gay and LGBTIQ rights in general. If found guilty, individuals would face heavy fines as well as prison terms of up to two years.

Criminal laws

In line with a general deterioration of human rights, Singapore has reformed its criminal justice system to allow police to arrest and detain persons without charge or judicial review.

E. Recent Court Cases Relating to Human Rights

Jolovan Wham

In 2017, Singaporean civil rights activist, Jolovan Wham, faced seven charges of organizing peaceful assemblies over a one year period, including a vigil protesting the

²⁹ Human Rights Watch (see note 27 above).

³⁰ ‘How powerful people use criminal-defamation laws to silence their critics’ The Economist, 13 July 2017, available at <https://www.economist.com/international/2017/07/13/how-powerful-people-use-criminal-defamation-laws-to-silence-their-critics>, accessed on 15 June 2018.

execution of Malaysian national, Prabakaran Srivijayan, in July 2017. If found guilty, he could face up to 3 years' imprisonment and a maximum fine of SG\$11,000 (US\$8,100). In late November 2017, Wham was taken into custody before being released on bail the following day. He was accused of seven charges, including three related to the Public Order Act, three under the Penal Code, and one under the Vandalism Act. Wham had peacefully assembled for various causes, ranging from publicly expressing support for Hong Kong independence (including allegedly chairing a Skype conversation with a Hong Kong student activist), to holding a vigil for hanged Malaysian, Prabakaran Srivijayan. In another incident, Wham held a peaceful protest on Singapore's Mass Rapid Transit to commemorate those arrested and detained in the city-state without charge or trial under the Internal Security Act (ISA).^{31,32}

Eugene Thuraisingam

Shortly before Singaporean drug trafficker, Muhammad Ridzuan Md Ali, was hanged at Changi Prison in May 2017, his lawyer, Eugene Thuraisingam, published a self-penned poem on his Facebook page, criticising the country's death penalty as well as government officials and the political elite. Ali, who had been convicted four years earlier of trafficking pure heroin in contravention of the Misuse of Drugs Act, had appealed against his conviction in 2014, 2015, and 2016 but to no avail. Thuraisingam's poem about his execution was deemed in contempt of court (a criminal offence) and he was eventually fined S\$7,000 (US\$5,122).

In a similar incident related to freedom of speech, US-based Singaporean and grandchild of Singapore's founding father, Lee Kuan Yew, Li Shengwu, published a post on his Facebook page alluding to the corrupt and dependent nature of Singapore's courts, for which he was charged with contempt of court. Finally, in September 2017, visual artist and activist, Seelan Palay, was arrested under the Public Order Act (POA) for commemorating Chia Thye Poh (the longest-serving political detainee in the world, having been imprisoned for 23 years without charge or trial and subsequently placed under house arrest for another nine years until his eventual release in May 1989). While Palay had been granted an official permit to protest at Hong Lim Park's Speakers' Corner, he failed to acquire similar permits for the National Gallery Singapore and Parliament House where he continued his silent protest. At the end of 2017, legal court procedures against Palay are ongoing.

³¹ 'Police to charge activist, Jolovan Wham, in court; Charges include organising public assemblies without permit' The Straits Times, 28 November 2017, available at <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/police-to-charge-civil-activist-jolovan-wham-in-court-charges-include-organising-public>, accessed on 12 June 2018.

³² 'AGC goes after civil activist and opposition politician for contempt of court' Today, 11 May 2018, available at <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/agc-proceeds-contempt-court-case-against-civil-activist-jolovan-wham>, accessed on 12 June 2018.

Prabakaran Srivijayan

Similar to the aforementioned case of Muhammad Ridzuan Md Ali who was hanged in 2017 for drug-related offences, Malaysian national, Prabakaran Srivijayan, shared the same fate in July 2017. The latter case carried specific weight for two reasons. First, in Srivijayan's home country of Malaysia, a case had already been lodged at the Court of Appeal against the execution of its citizen in Singapore. In such circumstances, international law states that death penalties must be halted. While Srivijaya's lawyers informed the Singapore Court of Appeal of the case, this was dismissed on grounds of abuse of process. Second, the execution of Srivijayan was announced and conducted at the last minute – his family only received notification of the execution 8 days prior. Thus, his execution – was widely viewed to have disregarded international laws.

Part 2: Outstanding Human Rights Issues³³

A. Further Restrictions on Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Assembly

With the amendment of the Public Order Act in mid-2017, Singapore continued to limit civil rights related to freedom of speech and assembly. Authorities are now able to ban public meetings and virtually exclude all non-Singaporeans from attending, participating, or observing public gatherings deemed to threaten political harmony.

In addition, the country has begun drafting a law on fake news which would encompass online and social media platforms such as Facebook and Whatsapp,³⁴ ostensibly to protect public harmony. Scheduled to be introduced in 2018, it is perceived to further limit the space for freedom of speech, markedly threatening the work of human rights activists and defenders.

B. Limitations on Foreigners Living in Singapore

In a recent and apparent crackdown on civil rights, the city-state proceeded in 2017 to further limit the rights of foreigners living in Singapore. While the country's print and digital media is already either largely owned by the government or tightly aligned to it, it nonetheless introduced additional regulations to prevent foreigners influencing its media outlets. At the same time, foreigners are not allowed to participate in public political discourses, assemblies, protests, and so on. Indeed, non-Singaporeans are often excluded from exercising such rights while simultaneously being subject to the same punishments as citizens. In particular, the acts of caning and capital punishment have often strained Singapore's relationships with other countries such as the Netherlands, Australia, the USA, and Malaysia.

³³ 'Singapore 2017/2018' Amnesty International, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/singapore/report-singapore/>, accessed on 13 June 2018.

³⁴ Chan, LE, 'New laws on fake news to be introduced next year: Shanmugam' Channel News Asia, 19 June 2017, available at <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/new-laws-on-fake-news-to-be-introduced-next-year-shanmugam-8958048>, accessed on 13 June 2018.

C. Exclusion of the LGBTIQ Community

As a conservative country, Singapore has a history of discriminatory and exclusive policies against the LGBTIQ community. For example, during the annual Pink Dot event of July 2017, local authorities required event organizers to set up barricades and conduct identity checks which had the effect of limiting the access of non-Singaporeans to the peaceful event, thus adversely affecting the community's right to freedom of assembly and speech.

D. Decent Housing for Migrant Workers

As Singapore is not a signatory to the ICMW, migrant workers remain vulnerable to governmental discrimination. For example, housing rights are extremely restrictive and migrant workers often must produce a variety of specific documents and fulfil onerous requirements to qualify. At the same time, decent housing is virtually inaccessible to migrant workers who may be forced to live in unhygienic conditions at the behest of their employers.

E. Steps Taken to Ensure National Security

By continuing to excessively apply its Internal Security Act (ISA), Singapore continues to breach international human rights law under the ICCPR and customary laws outlined in the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), both of which Singapore was obliged to accede to as a United Nations member in 1965. Under the ISA, individuals may be detained without charge or trial for indefinitely renewable two-year periods. The longest-serving political prisoner in the world, Chia Thye Poh, was detained in 1966 in Singapore.

Part 3: Conclusion^{35,36,37,38}

With ASEAN setting the stage for greater regional economic integration, as the wealthiest of the 10 member states, potentially Singapore could take the lead in pursuing this goal. Whilst tiny in size, the city-state has been able to boost its economic progress albeit at the expense of civil and political rights. A culturally diverse country with four main ethnicities and even more religions, Singapore has been applauded by many governments for its recognition of ethnic minority rights. Indeed, some saw the amendment of its Constitution in 2016/2017 to allow only specific minorities to run for the presidency as a visible step towards strengthening minority rights. However, its

³⁵ 'World report 2017: Singapore' Human Rights Watch, available at <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/singapore>, accessed on 13 June 2018.

³⁶ Chia, B, 'Robbed of our right to elect our president' Youth.sg, 13 September 2017, available at <https://www.youth.sg/Our-Voice/Opinions/2017/9/Robbed-of-our-right-to-elect-our-president>, accessed on 10 August 2018.

³⁷ Han, K, 'How Singapore elected a president without a vote' CNN, 12 September 2017, available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/11/asia/singapore-race-presidential-election/index.html>, accessed on 20 June 2018.

³⁸ 'Anger in Singapore as first female president is elected without a vote' The Guardian, 13 September 2017, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/13/singapore-first-female-president-elected-without-vote>, accessed on 20 June 2018.

critics, particularly the political opposition, considered the amendments a violation of human rights, and a convenient way for the government to prevent a main opposition party member of Chinese ethnicity (Tan Cheng Bock)³⁹ from running for president. Tan, a former member of the ruling People's Action Party (PAP), claimed that the 2017 election, which restricted the electorate to Singaporean Malays only, was a blatant attempt to prevent his participation. Tan's opposition to the amendment found vast support among Singaporean political and civil society, many of whom regarded the action as unconstitutional. Reactions ranged from silent protests at Hong Lim Park to a trending hash tag on social media (#NotMyPresident) which was reminiscent of the reaction of many Americans following Donald Trump's election as US President. Likewise, the Workers' Party of Singapore made several attempts to raise the issue in Parliament to voice its concerns over an election that effectively prevented Singaporean citizens from having a say in the future political leadership of their city-state.

³⁹ *Tan Cheng Bock v Attorney-General* [2017] SGCA 50, available at <http://www.singaporelaw.sg/sglaw/laws-of-singapore/case-law/free-law/court-of-appeal-judgments/22934-tan-cheng-bock-v-attorney-general>, accessed on 15 June 2018.