

**Second Reading Speech by Mr Chan Chun Sing,
Minister for Trade and Industry, for the Prime Minister, for
Parliamentary Elections (COVID-19 Special Arrangements) Bill
on Monday, 4 May 2020**

Introduction

1. Mr Speaker, on behalf of the Prime Minister, I beg to move that the Bill be now read a second time.
2. Our next General Election must be held by 14 Apr 2021.
3. The COVID-19 situation is most likely to last many more months, including the possibility of recurring waves of infection across the world.
4. We must therefore make contingency plans to safely conduct our next General Election under the COVID-19 situation.
5. This is the responsible thing to do. To robustly plan ahead. To keep our citizens safe while upholding our democracy.

Coverage of Bill

6. The Parliamentary Elections (COVID-19 Special Arrangements) Bill forms ***part*** of the contingency plans to allow the Elections Department (ELD) to implement temporary arrangements for safe elections amidst the COVID-19 situation. These are on top of sections 56A to 56F of the Parliamentary Elections Act, which already contain powers to deal with some disruptive events.
7. The key provisions in this Bill are in two main parts.
8. The first part deals with voters who are subject to movement control orders i.e. COVID-19 stay orders, commonly known as “Stay Home Notice” or SHN in short, a COVID-19 Quarantine Order (or QO in short) or being on Medical Certificate (MC) because he/she shows Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI).
9. The second part allows an aspiring candidate to authorise a representative to file his or her nomination paper if the aspiring candidate is unable or unfit to do so because of a COVID-19 QO, SHN, hospitalisation or ill health.

Provisions in the Bill for certain categories of voters

10. I will first cover the clauses, which will allow us to make special arrangements for voters subject to movement control orders. In particular, those on SHN will be allowed to vote outside of their electoral divisions. This is because a number of voters, since 10 April, have been required to serve their SHN at designated facilities such as hotels for 14 days to isolate themselves from others and we will continue to issue SHN as part of the strategy to control community transmission.

11. Clause 3 excuses voters issued with QO, SHN at home or MC for ARI for not voting. Their names will be restored to the electoral registers without penalty. There will be auto-restoration for those on QO and serving their SHN at home, as we have the information for this group. For those on MC for ARI, they can apply to restore their names to the registers after the election and we will restore them without penalty. Clauses 4 and 5 cater to persons on SHN at designated facilities by authorising temporary polling arrangements for them to vote outside their electoral divisions, either at special polling stations in the SHN designated facilities or some other suitable premises. We do this to minimise their direct contact with other voters. This is possible because, unlike persons on MC for ARI, those on SHN are already co-located physically in designated facilities thus allowing such arrangements to be rapidly deployed.

12. Polling at the special polling stations will be akin to that at overseas polling stations. Clause 6 requires that a poll and voting at an election involving electors subject to SHN be conducted in the same manner as voting at a polling station in Singapore, with the following modifications:

- a) Instead of the usual voting hours from 8am to 8pm, the Returning Officer can set the voting hours at the special polling stations differently, as long as they are at least 4 hours and end by close of polls at all other polling stations in Singapore, that is, by 8 pm on Polling Day.
- b) There can only be one polling agent for each political party, independent candidate or group of independent candidates at each of the special polling stations.
- c) The election official at the special polling stations will have to call out the electoral division and polling district code of the voter before issuing a ballot paper, because each special polling

station would have voters from many electoral divisions casting their votes there.

- d) If there are no dedicated ballot boxes provided for voting in different electoral divisions at each special polling station, the election officials will have to sort the ballot papers from the opened ballot boxes according to electoral divisions first before starting to count the votes.

13. Under Clause 6(3), the Minister is empowered to make regulations setting out additional modifications to the Parliamentary Elections Act, so as to minimise exposure of the general public or election officials to individuals who may be incubating or infected by COVID-19.

Provisions in Bill to allow an aspiring candidate to authorise a representative to file his or her nomination paper on his or her behalf

14. Let me now move on to the second part of the provisions relating to nomination proceedings.

15. The Parliamentary Elections Act requires aspiring candidates to submit their nomination papers in person. Clause 9 allows an aspiring candidate to authorise a representative to file his or her nomination paper on his or her behalf, if the aspiring candidate is unable or unfit to do so because of QO, SHN, hospitalisation or ill-health.

16. The authorised representative must have the Power of Attorney to authorise him or her to act on behalf of the candidate. The authorised representative will be able to file objections and make amendments to the nomination papers on the candidate's behalf during the nomination proceedings. The other requirements for successful nomination, such as having the Political Donation Certificate and the required number of subscribers, must still be fulfilled.

17. The Bill does not allow for alternative representation for subscribers i.e. proposers, seconders and assentors. As subscribers can be anyone whose name is in the relevant register of electors, aspiring candidates should find a replacement if any of their subscribers is subject to movement control orders like QO, SHN or MC for ARI, or is having a fever or showing ARI symptoms on the day of nomination.

Conclusion

18. Let me conclude by reiterating the intent behind this Bill. The Bill aims to protect voters, candidates and election officials at the next General Election by providing the Elections Department and the Returning Officer with additional powers to make special arrangements to deal with running a general election under the COVID-19 situation, on top of the powers in sections 56A to 56F of the Parliamentary Elections Act.

19. While this Bill enables the Elections Department and the Returning Officer to make contingency plans for the next General Election, which must be held within a year from now, the Bill is unrelated to the timing of the General Election. The Prime Minister will decide when to call the election, considering the challenges confronting our country and the evolving COVID-19 situation.

20. Mr Speaker, I beg to move.