

PRESS RELEASE

Issuance of Correction Directions under the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act to *Jom*

1. During the Parliamentary sitting on 3 July 2023, four Ministerial Statements relating to the rentals of State properties at 26 Ridout Road and 31 Ridout Road were delivered. On 7 July 2023, *Jom*, an online publication, published an article (“*Singapore This Week*”) which made the statements that:

- a) Senior Minister Teo Chee Hean did not respond to questions concerning the issue of actual or apparent conflicts of interest and possible breach of the Code of Conduct for Ministers beyond replying that it is more important to observe the spirit rather than just the letter of the Code.
- b) The Singapore Land Authority (SLA) spent more than \$1 million on the renovation for 26 Ridout Road and 31 Ridout Road because the Ministers were to be the tenants.
- c) The Government caused Instagram to geo-block a post by Charles Yeo.

2. The Minister for Culture, Community and Youth and Second Minister for Law Edwin Tong, and the Minister for Communications and Information Josephine Teo have instructed for Correction Directions, under the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), to be issued to *Jom*. *Jom* will be required to carry the correction notices, stating that the article contains false statements of fact.

Clarifications on the False Statements

Correction Direction issued by the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth and Second Minister for Law

3. First, *Jom* made the statement that Senior Minister Teo Chee Hean did not respond to questions concerning the issue of actual or apparent conflicts of interest and possible breach of the Code of Conduct for Ministers beyond replying that it is more important to observe the spirit rather than just the letter of the Code. The article omits important information from what Senior Minister Teo Chee Hean said in Parliament¹ on 3 July 2023.

¹ SM Teo’s Ministerial Statement is available at: <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/Ministerial-Statement-by-SM-Teo-Chee-Hean-on-Ridout-Road>

- a) Senior Minister Teo Chee Hean had expressly clarified that he meant it was important to observe the spirit as well as the letter of the Code. Senior Minister Teo Chee Hean also said that Minister K Shanmugam had recused himself, and this meant that he no longer had any duty in the matter. There could thus be no potential or actual conflict of interest.
 - b) Senior Minister Teo Chee Hean had explained how Minister K Shanmugam had removed himself from the chain of command and decision-making process entirely in the case of 26 Ridout Road.
 - c) Senior Minister Teo Chee Hean had also highlighted that the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) had established, as part of its independent investigation, that no matter was raised by SLA to the Ministry of Law and hence to any of the Ministers during the entire rental process.
4. Second, *Jom* made an untrue statement that SLA spent more than \$1 million on the renovation for 26 Ridout Road and 31 Ridout Road because the Ministers were to be the tenants. The identity of the tenants had no bearing on the amount spent by SLA on the works it carried out on 26 Ridout Road and 31 Ridout Road. The article implies that this sum was unusually large, and omits important information that the works done by SLA were consistent with SLA's general practice, and were assessed to be necessary in the circumstances, as explained by Second Minister for Law Edwin Tong in Parliament on 3 July 2023.
- a) SLA invests a significant amount in maintaining conserved properties such as 26 Ridout Road and 31 Ridout Road. A key reason for the cost is the nature of the conservation requirements for such properties, which are much older than the average property in Singapore. Second Minister for Law Edwin Tong had spoken at length in Parliament about the details of these conservation requirements. While the maintenance works are done in periodic cycles, SLA does them in the lead up to a confirmed tenancy where practical, to avoid disrupting existing tenants and to ensure that the costs can be recovered from the prospective tenant. SLA has published information showing that similar and even larger amounts have been spent by SLA on other Black and White bungalows in a manner consistent with conservation requirements.
 - b) In the case of 26 Ridout Road and 31 Ridout Road, most of the costs incurred by SLA were for works that external consultants had determined to be necessary, in light of the condition of the properties and to comply with the relevant conservation requirements. The remaining costs were incurred as part of the usual works done before the commencement of a tenancy to ensure that the property is habitable.

Correction Direction issued by the Minister for Communications and Information

5. Third, *Jom* also made the statement that the Government caused Instagram to geo-block a post by Charles Yeo. This is untrue. The Government did not issue any directions or requests on this matter to Meta, Instagram's parent company, that caused Instagram to geo-block the post in question.

Publication of Correction Notices

6. As required by the Correction Directions, *Jom* must publish correction notices on the said posts on its website and social media pages. The correction notices will provide a link to the Factually article, which lays out the facts and clarifications on the matter, at the following link: <https://www.gov.sg/article/factually160723-b>.

**MINISTRY OF LAW
MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION
16 JULY 2023**
