

F1 WORKS TO HIT THE ROAD

Street circuit gets FIA nod, LTA awards \$18m contracts

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SINGAPORE'S street circuit for next year's Formula 1 race has gotten the green light from the world motor sport body, and this is a signal for work to begin next month.

The Land Transport Authority (LTA) has awarded a total of \$18 million of contracts for three major works around the 5-km circuit, the design of which has received in-principle approval from the Federation Internationale de L'Automobile (FIA).

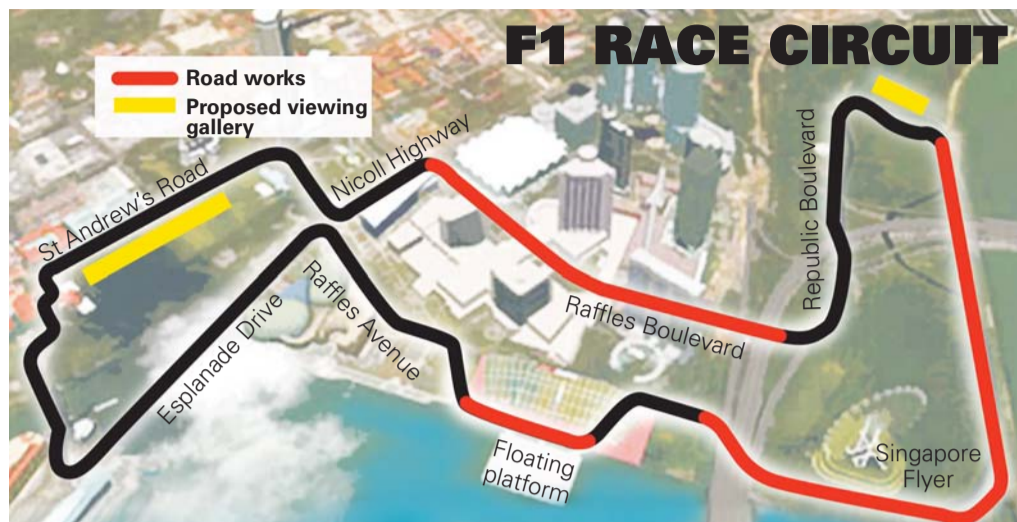
The road along Raffles Boulevard, from Nicoll Highway to Temasek Avenue, will be widened by one lane. Existing roads in the city centre along the F1 track will also be modified with road kerbs and traffic islands removed.

A new 1.2-km road off Republic Boulevard will also be built. It will form part of the start and finish straights on the track.

After the races end, a section of the new road, linked to Republic Boulevard, will open for daily traffic use.

The promenade, fronting the seating gallery of the Marina Bay Floating Platform, will also be widened, and a new road added.

Marking the one-year countdown on Friday to the race start next year, Minister of State for Trade and Industry S Iswaran said all government agencies, including the LTA, are committed to "minimising the disruption" for road users.



SOURCE: URBAN REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY. GRAPHICS: YEN YOK

The LTA said information on traffic diversions will be provided and road works carried out during non-peak hours, where possible. The road works are expected to be completed next May.

The FIA will make several inspections in the coming months and issue the full circuit licence after the final inspection on the week of the race itself.

According to Singapore Tourism Board (STB) director Leong Yue Kheong, organisers expect between 100,000 and 130,000 ticket-holding spectators on each race day. Several spectator stands are being planned at the Padang facing City Hall, and at the first turn of the circuit at Republic Boulevard.

But organisers are also drawing up plans in anticipation of crowd sizes surging beyond 130,000. Plans include designating drop-off points for public transport, and staging post-

race events that will stagger movements out of the area. The STB is looking into concerts headlined by top acts as part of the fringe activities.

The Singapore Grand Prix — one of only three race circuits with Istanbul in Turkey and Sao Paulo in Brazil on next year's F1 calendar to run anti-clockwise — will be the 15th stop on the 18-leg calendar.

Mr Iswaran told reporters that organisers were approaching "the last mile" in finding out whether Singapore's race will be the first night race in F1 history.

The organisers have begun lighting trials at overseas circuits. If given the approval to run a night race here, they will start conducting lighting trials here next May on the start and finish straights.

watch www.channelnewsasia.com/video

SIGN UP AS RACE MARSHALLS

An estimated 1,000 people will be involved in ensuring the 2008 Singapore Grand Prix will run smoothly, and you could be part of the action. Trials to select volunteers for the Sept 28 event will be conducted soon.

"We're looking at training about 1,000 people, including race marshalls," said Singapore GP director (media and communications) Jonathan Hallett, 45.

"The trainers could come from Australia, and we want to train them not just for next year, but for subsequent years as well."

Details of the training programme, conducted by the Singapore Sports Council, Singapore Motor Sports Association, and Singapore GP, are expected to be announced early next month.

It is likely to last at least two months, and could include stints at current F1 stops, such as Malaysia, China and Japan.

Said Mr Hallett: "It is important that Singapore develops its own pool of qualified race marshalls and other officials to run races, and train new ones."

Singapore will host the event for five years from next year.

Those interesting in helping out as volunteers can email info@singaporegp.sg. Visit www.singaporegp.sg for details.

— TAN YO-HINN

Govt to review programmes for kids who need help

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AGAINST the backdrop of a widening income gap and economic boom, the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) has announced it will review all programmes for vulnerable children and dysfunctional families.

"We must be mindful of how national trends affect our children. We must work together to find ways to make their concerns more visible," MCYS Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said at an event on Friday.

Also up for review in the coming months is the Children and Young Persons Act. Last revamped in 2001, it safeguards the welfare and interests of those below 16.

Between 1980 and last year, the general divorce rate for women rose from 3.8 to 8 for every 1,000 married females. In 2005, single parents headed 5 per cent of households with at least one child below 16 — up from about 4 per cent in 1990.

"Despite the parents' best intentions, these families are more likely to struggle to provide the best home and future for their children," said the minister, adding that younger generations are also confronted with "unlimited temptations and influences", such



as the virtual online world.

Speaking to a 550-strong crowd at the inaugural Singapore Children's Society Lecture, Dr Balakrishnan also argued that more must be done to understand and tackle "in a more holistic manner" mental health issues among children and adolescents.

While there is a "robust" health-screening programme for about 99 per cent of seven- and 12-year-olds, health "is not just about the absence of illness, disease or injury".

Another area is pre-school education. Last year's figures showed that 5 per cent of children entering primary school did not attend pre-school. "We want to ensure that as many children as possible are in pre-school, so they get a good start in life," he said.

Looking ahead, the minister outlined four principles to boost child development in Singapore: To plan and address the child's interests in a holistic fashion; enhance and integrate good-quality and affordable services; provide specialised help to vulnerable and special groups, and inculcate a shared sense of responsibility among agencies and individuals.

Know or don't know, it's still illegal

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Last year, a record 357 Singaporeans were diagnosed with HIV. Men account for 91 per cent of the total, with 68 per cent contracting the virus through heterosexual sex. In the first eight months of this year, another 278 Singaporeans were diagnosed.

Mr Khaw does not think the amendments will further stigmatise HIV patients and pose a barrier to self-testing.

"Right now, they'd rather not test", preferring to hide behind the mantle of ignorance, he said. The amendments will "make it clear it doesn't matter if you know you are HIV-positive or not ... (you will need to test regularly) as long as your sexual behaviour is high-risk".

A person who breaches this law would be fined up to \$50,000 and/or jailed for up to 10 years.

This latest move against HIV comes as the MOH steps up targeted strategies for different groups. In July, Senior Minister of State (Foreign Affairs and Information, Communications and the Arts) Balaji Sadasivan led a team of non-government volunteers and MOH officials to New South Wales, to study how the state dealt with HIV and Aids. The Government has pledged closer working ties with non-governmental organisations and academia.

Despite public education over the

years, rates have continued to hit new highs, resulting in the proposed change to the Infectious Diseases Act. Enacted in 1976, it was last amended in 2003 to cope with the Sars crisis.

It's not just HIV that is a concern now, as other proposed amendments include those to cope with an impending flu pandemic — as was first reported in this paper in July.

The Health Minister will be empowered to declare a public health emergency in the event of an outbreak or imminent outbreak of an infectious disease that "poses a substantial risk of a significant number of human fatalities or incidents of permanent or long-term disability in Singapore".

Existing legislation allows the prohibition of specific meetings, gatherings and public entertainment. But "in a severe outbreak, a more extensive prohibition on gatherings needs to be quickly implemented across the island", said the MOH.

The amendments would also empower the Director of Medical Services to close any premises that may be the source of an outbreak. Currently, this extends only to food establishments.

The first reading of the Bill is expected in January. The MOH is conducting a public consultation on the proposed amendments. Log onto www.moh.gov.sg for details. The exercise ends on Nov 9.