

President Halimah calls on more people to volunteer

Over 64,000 have signed up through SG Cares Volunteer Centres



President Halimah Yacob at the launch of the #GiveAsOneSG campaign on Wednesday at Chua Chu Kang Community Club with (from left) Senior Lieutenant-Colonel Lim Poh Chuan, chairman, strategic communications group, NDP 2023 Executive Committee; and Colonel Terence Ho, chairman of the NDP 2023 Executive Committee. ST PHOTO: SHINTARO TAY

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Correspondent

Singapore has many existing initiatives that promote volunteerism and the momentum of such work must not be lost, President Halimah Yacob said on Wednesday at a community event, where she called for more Singaporeans to step forward and help others.

This is even as more are now volunteering today: Over 64,000 volunteers have signed up through the SG Cares Volunteer Centres (VCs), which were started in 2018 under SG Cares, the nationwide volunteerism movement. About a quarter of them volunteer regularly, she said.

The 24 VCs match volunteers and resources with community needs and channel donations in

kind to the right beneficiaries. To date, more than 437,000 beneficiaries have been helped, she said.

Speaking at the launch of the #GiveAsOneSG campaign to spur more people to volunteer as part of Singapore's National Day celebrations, Madam Halimah said that volunteers become a part of something larger than themselves.

"We meet people with different life circumstances; we learn to appreciate the diversity in our communities; and we understand the important role we can play in making our neighbourhoods safer, stronger and more vibrant," she said at the event at Chua Chu Kang Community Club.

"We become part of a community with a sense of shared identity and mutual responsibility towards one another."

The VCs have played a crucial role in creating opportunities for

Singaporeans to volunteer for causes which they are passionate about, she said.

For instance, the centres have to date trained more than 5,000 volunteer leaders and built 3,000 partnerships with community organisations.

The centres, which are operated by community-based organisations appointed by the SG Cares Office, are also stepping up their recruitment of volunteers.

For instance, Fei Yue Community Services launched a new programme at the event to grow its volunteer pool for its town-based initiatives. It runs three centres – in Choa Chu Kang, Bukit Batok and Hougang.

The centres are looking for more volunteers to support residents with mental health conditions and vulnerable seniors who are isolated. The volunteers may chaperone

outings for seniors to keep them active or accompany them on medical appointments.

Madam Halimah said that volunteerism is "our collective responsibility" as part of building a Singapore where people care for one another.

According to the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, in the past year, the total number of volunteers and beneficiaries grew by 67 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively.

Calling volunteerism a "crucial aspect of nation-building", Madam Halimah encouraged all Singaporeans to step forward and make time for others.

The #GiveAsOneSG initiative is a collaboration between the National Day Parade (NDP) 2023 executive committee and the SG Cares Volunteer Centres.

Those who are keen to know where and how they can volunteer can go to the National Day website.

Activities include packing and distributing meals or befriending families. Those interested can sign up through the SG Cares app or in person at VCs.

There will be a blood donation drive organised by the Singapore Red Cross Society on June 17, in conjunction with World Blood Donor Day.

Madam Halimah said that no matter how big or small the contribution, every act of volunteering makes a difference.

Ms Grace Teo, vice-chairman of the South View Primary School Parents Association (SVPA), said partnering with the SG Cares Volunteer Centre @ Chua Chu Kang helped the group find volunteering activities that were suitable for both parents and children.

In 2022, members of the association and their children first started cleaning homes of elderly folk in rental flats as a one-off event. They later received additional requests from residents to paint their homes.

Through the second half of 2022, some 100 parents and pupils painted about 15 homes. Earlier in 2023, SVPA organised a carnival at an aged home that included performances and a lucky draw, said Ms Teo.

Ms Teo said volunteering is a meaningful way to give back, and offers an opportunity for parents and children to talk about how they can help the less fortunate.

Her advice to those who are on the fence about volunteering?

"There are so many things to help out with. Just do it," she said. "You may not feel that what you are doing makes a lot of difference, but to (the beneficiaries), it does."

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Physiotherapists help cut waiting time at TTSH emergency department

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Waiting times have improved and treatment is better coordinated with a model of care launched less than a year ago at the emergency department (ED) at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH).

The department there is the busiest in Singapore, handling about 132,000 cases a year.

Among the patients seeking help are those suffering pain from joints, bones and muscles as a result of sprains, degeneration, bruises or falls. These are generally non-emergency cases, and make up about 15 per cent of cases, or 19,000 cases, per year.

Such cases are on the rise as the population ages, and to cater to the growing demand, TTSH introduced a model where patients see a trained advanced practice physiotherapist (APP) instead of a doctor when they come to the ED.

The initiative to improve waiting time and provide timely treatment, which was rolled out in June 2022, is a collaboration by the physiotherapy, emergency, orthopaedic, hand and reconstructive microsurgery, and radiology departments at the hospital.

It is designed to improve patient outcomes, enhance patient workflows and add value to healthcare in the wake of workforce shortages and fiscal burden for TTSH.

Principal physiotherapist Ngo Xueting said: "The APPs are trained to independently manage patients with joint, muscle and bone issues, and see them directly after they register and are triaged by a nurse at the ED. For the first time, the APPs are able to order medical imaging instead of getting a doctor to do so."

Since June 2022, the APPs have treated about 134 patients.

"A key benefit is it helps increase efficiency in the ED. As doctors, we are able to focus on treating life-threatening emergencies," said senior consultant in emergency medicine Terence See.

The model has so far reduced the waiting time for such patients by between 30 per cent and 50 per cent, and by 70 per cent for a patient to receive physiotherapy.

Businesswoman Sabrina Lau, 66,

who went to the ED at TTSH in March when the pain in her right knee suddenly became unbearable, said the whole process took less time than she expected.

"After registering and seeing a triage nurse, I waited only 30 to 45 minutes before I was ushered into a room to see an APP. I was sent for an X-ray to ensure there was no fracture, and by the time I was told what the issue was, taught to do exercises and given my medication, I was out of the ED in just three hours," she said.

When she took her mother to the same ED two months earlier after the older woman fainted, it was 12 hours before she was discharged, said Ms Lau.

Other Singapore restructured hospitals have also started initiatives to cut waiting times and reduce staff workload at their EDs.

Since January, the physiotherapy team at National University Hospital (NUH) has had same-day consultations on weekdays for patients referred by the ED. This is part of the National One-Rehab Framework to facilitate patients' timely access to appropriate types of rehabilitation care.

Senior principal physiotherapist Ng Tze Siong of NUH's Department of Rehabilitation said patients who benefit from a same-day consultation include those with pain resulting from muscle degeneration or acute pain that improves with painkillers; those able to walk who would benefit from physiotherapy; and those with difficulty walking but with less pain after medication given at the ED.

Ng Teng Fong General Hospital (NTFGH) started a care management scheme for frail, elderly people who frequently visit its ED in August 2020. Its goal was to "decongest the emergency department and save beds".

Under the scheme, case managers intervene with all at-risk elderly people, and patients of any age who are functionally and socially challenged, said NTFGH head of physiotherapy Lee Chiew Lan.

Between May 2022 and April 2023, the ED at NTFGH had 34,225 patients aged 65 years and above coming in for treatment, and its team managed to intervene in almost 3 per cent, or 1,017, of them.

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A picture showing what is believed to be part of a satellite launch vehicle that North Korea said had crashed into the sea off the west coast of South Korea on Wednesday. It was Pyongyang's sixth satellite launch attempt. PHOTOS: REUTERS

N. Korean satellite launch ends in sea; South recovers parts

SEOUL/TOKYO – A North Korean satellite launch on Wednesday ended in failure, sending the booster and payload plunging into the sea, North Korean state media said, and the South's military said it had recovered parts of the launch vehicle.

The new "Chollima-1" rocket failed because of instability in the engine and fuel system, state news agency KCNA reported.

The flight was the state's sixth satellite launch attempt and the first since 2016. It was supposed to put its first spy satellite in orbit.

It prompted emergency alerts and brief evacuation warnings in parts of South Korea and Japan. The notices were withdrawn with no danger or damage reported.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the military was con-

ducting a salvage operation to recover what is believed to be parts of the space launch vehicle.

The military shared pictures of a large cylindrical object floating in the sea about 200km off the west coast island of Eocheongdo.

Professor George William Herbert, adjunct professor at the Centre for Nonproliferation Studies and a missile consultant, said the images showed at least part of a rocket, including an "interstage" section designed to connect to another stage.

It is most likely a liquid-fuel rocket, he added, and a round, brown object inside is likely a propellant tank for either fuel or oxidiser.

Officials from the United States, Japan and South Korea held a phone call, where they "strongly condemned" the launch, Japan's

Foreign Ministry said.

"The three countries will stay vigilant with high sense of urgency", the statement said.

North Korea had said it would launch its first military reconnaissance satellite between May 31 and June 11 to boost monitoring of US military activities.

South Korea last week placed satellites in orbit with a domestically designed and produced rocket for the first time, and China sent three astronauts to its space station as part of crew rotation on Tuesday.

The North Korean rocket plunged into the sea "after losing thrust due to the abnormal starting of the second-stage engine", KCNA reported, in an unusually candid admission of a technical failure by the North.

Pyongyang's National Aerospace

Development Administration (Nada) will investigate the "serious defects" and take action to overcome them before conducting a second launch as soon as possible, KCNA said.

North Korea appeared to have rushed its satellite launch after Seoul's recent space rocket launch, a South Korean lawmaker said, citing his country's intelligence agency.

Lawmaker Yoo Sang-beom told journalists that North Korea's leader was believed to have observed the launch, and Pyongyang may need several weeks at least to fix its rocket's problems.

Analysts say North Korea's capacity for constructing sophisticated satellites remains unproven.

In data provided to the international authorities before the

launch, North Korea said the rocket would fly south, with stages and other debris expected to fall over the Yellow Sea and into the Pacific Ocean.

Air raid sirens wailed across Seoul around 6.32am local time (5.32am Singapore time) as the city warned citizens to prepare for a potential evacuation. Later alerts said the city warning had been a mistake.

"I was so panicked," said Ms Lee Juyeon, 33, a resident in the city of about 10 million who was preparing to shelter in a basement with her child before learning it was a false alarm.

The Japanese government issued an emergency warning over its J-Alert broadcasting system for residents of the southern prefecture of Okinawa to take cover indoors

early on Wednesday morning.

It later said the rocket would not fly into Japanese territory and lifted the warnings. Japan had vowed to shoot down any projectile that threatened its territory.

The White House condemned the launch using ballistic missile technology, and said in a statement it was assessing the situation in coordination with allies.

Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said North Korea's rocket disappeared from radar above the Yellow Sea and did not make it into space. Japan strongly condemns the launch and has lodged a complaint to Pyongyang through diplomatic channels in Beijing, he said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also condemned the launch, a spokesman said. REUTERS



People in Seoul watching a television news report yesterday on North Korea firing its new "Chollima-1" satellite launch rocket, which failed because of instability in the engine and fuel system. The flight, the state's first since 2016, was supposed to put North Korea's first spy satellite in orbit.