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# THE STRAITS TIMES

MDDI (P) 046/10/2025

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## Nipah virus • Asian nations step up checks

The latest outbreak of the deadly Nipah virus in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal has been effectively contained, the Indian government said on Jan 27, with only two cases confirmed so far.

It comes amid reports of several Asian countries ramping up surveillance measures at border entry points to screen potential carriers of the virus from India.

In Singapore, temperature screening will be set up at airports for flights arriving from areas hit by the virus. Other measures include health advisories for travellers at points of entry here.

SEE THE BIG STORY • **A6**

## EnterpriseSG • Help for 11,700 firms in 2025

Enterprise Singapore (EnterpriseSG) supported 11,700 businesses to grow their revenue and strengthen cost competitiveness in 2025.

It added that 2,400 of them embarked on transformative projects, which are expected to increase their annual revenues by \$12.3 billion and create 10,000 skilled jobs.

EnterpriseSG chairman Lee Chuan Teck acknowledged that its latest projections for revenue and jobs growth were lower than what it projected at its previous annual briefing in 2025 because of the gloomier global outlook.

SEE THE BIG STORY • **A2**

## Race against time as peat fire rages in Johor



Firefighters are racing against time to snuff out a peat fire that has been raging underground for almost a week in Pengerang, Johor. It is one of several wildfire spots that have been reported in Johor. On Jan 27, a Johor fire and rescue department official told The Straits Times that there were 71 wildfire cases reported across 10 districts in the state the day before. Smoke from the peat fire, about 30km away from neighbouring Singapore, has led to haze in the eastern parts of the Republic as well as several areas in Johor in recent days. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG SEE THE BIG STORY • **A4**

# Step up efforts to support older workers, NTUC urges bosses, Govt

## Job redesign, skills upgrading, age-inclusive practices among ways to help: Desmond Tan

**Chin Soo Fang**  
Senior Correspondent

For Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) senior enrolled nurse Lillian Teng Ngwen Hua, 69, technology has had a very real impact on her ability to stay on in her profession.

Before TTSH implemented its smart predictive patient monitoring system (PreSAGE) in 2022, Ms Teng said she had to strain her back

to set up manual fall alarms for each patient with a fall risk.

PreSAGE, which uses wall-mounted thermal cameras and video analytics, does away with such laborious set-up, while also giving nurses an extended response window of up to 15 seconds and significantly fewer false alarms than traditional fall sensor mats.

"With technology making work less physically demanding and more predictive, I can continue



NTUC deputy secretary-general Desmond Tan called for more support for employers to hire, train and retain older workers.

working effectively as long as I remain physically and mentally healthy," said Ms Teng, who has been working at TTSH for 19 years.

During a visit to the hospital on Jan 28, National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) deputy secretary-general Desmond Tan cited the ex-

pansion of the fall monitoring system as an example of meaningful cooperation between an employer and a union to better support older workers.

By working with the Healthcare Services Employees' Union (HSEU) and tapping NTUC's Company Training Committee (CTC) grant, the hospital will scale-up PreSAGE to cover more than 1,180 beds by end-2026 from 311 beds now.

Ahead of Budget 2026, Mr Tan called on employers and the Government to do more to support older workers through job redesign, skills upgrading and age-inclusive

practices.

As Singapore's workforce ages and artificial intelligence (AI) reshapes jobs in every industry, employers, unions and the Government need to create the right conditions for older workers to stay productive, engaged, and employable, he said.

He noted that a recent survey conducted by NTUC showed that older workers' desire to work beyond 70 increases with age, driven mainly by their wish to stay mentally and physically active.

The 2025 survey of 591 respondents across all age groups also showed that older workers value

choice and flexibility in work options or arrangements.

Mr Tan, who is also Senior Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, urged more employers to partner with NTUC and its unions to set up CTCs to support age-friendly job redesign.

Under the CTC programme, companies form committees together with unions to map out workers' skills upgrading needs. Such firms can also apply for NTUC's CTC Grant, which defrays costs to rework business processes, redesign jobs and raise productivity.

In addition, Mr Tan called on the Government to continue supporting employers to hire, train and retain older workers, such as through providing grants to improve age-friendly workplaces and enhancing the Senior Employment Credit (SEC).

The SEC helps defray the wage costs employers bear for hiring Singaporeans aged 60 and above who earn less than \$4,000 a month.

The employment rate among ol-

CONTINUED ON PAGE **A2**

## S'porean boy, 14, who simulated ISIS terror attacks on Roblox issued ISA restriction order

**Nadine Chua**

A 14-year-old Singaporean boy who aspired to travel overseas to conduct armed violence and die a martyr has been issued a restriction order (RO) under the Internal Security Act (ISA).

The Secondary 3 student is the third 14-year-old to be dealt with under the ISA over the past two years for terrorism-related activities, said the Internal Security Department (ISD), which urged the public to seek help from the authorities early if they suspect so-

meone close to them may be radicalised.

ISD said on Jan 28 that the boy's radicalisation online by militant group ISIS' extremist ideologies began in early 2023, when he was 12.

He had come across a video of ISIS fighters battling American soldiers in Al-Fallujah, Iraq, and saw the terrorist group as defenders of the civilian population against American and Iraqi oppressors.

As he searched for more information on ISIS, online algorithms pushed more ISIS-related videos to his social media feed. He also discovered a pro-ISIS website through

social media, and spent around nine hours daily consuming its extremist content.

In just a year, the boy became a staunch supporter of ISIS, took a pledge of allegiance, and considered himself an ISIS member.

To show his support, he created pro-ISIS videos using footage from his online gameplay on Roblox and Gorebox. These included recreating ISIS executions and role-playing as an ISIS fighter who killed "disbelievers".

Besides simulating ISIS attacks on military bases, such as with car bombs, sniper attacks and suicide bombings, he also simulated exe-

cutions by shooting prisoners in-game or beheading them with knives, said ISD.

Knowing that he was too young to physically take up arms for ISIS, the boy aspired to travel about 10 years later to Syria, Afghanistan, Africa, Iraq, or Bali in Indonesia to fight and die as a martyr on the battlefield, the department added.

To prepare for this, the boy practised close-quarter battle simulations at home daily for hours with a toy AK-47 rifle, role-playing as an ISIS fighter attacking the US Army or the Israel Defence Forces, whom he considered enemies.

He also attempted to garner sup-

port on social media by posting at least one publicly accessible pro-ISIS video every day using footage and jihadist songs he found online.

In November 2025, ISD issued an RO against the boy. This means he cannot travel out of Singapore or access social media without approval.

ISD said the boy's exposure to ISIS content exacerbated his pre-existing unease with the LGBTQ community.

After he viewed materials about the June 2016 ISIS-inspired mass shooting at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, he believed that members of the LGBTQ community should be killed.

"He had thoughts of participating in an attack against the LGBTQ community in Singapore using guns, should one be initiated by others. However, he did not develop his violent ideations further," said ISD.

Apart from ISIS, the boy was supportive of other Islamist terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and Hamas. He also idolised terrorist personalities such as deceased Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki, and the perpetrators of the 2002 Bali bombings.

In February 2024, after learning about the Bali bombings from an online documentary, he drafted a mock-up of an attack targeting a random nightclub in Bali, using a

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# EnterpriseSG supported 1,700 firms in 2025 amid tariff tensions

2,400 of them embarked on transformative projects to boost annual revenues by \$12.3b

**Annabelle Liang**  
Correspondent

Home-grown furniture brand Castlery makes its products in factories in Asia and sends most of its stock to the US, placing it in the cross hairs of President Donald Trump's tariffs, which are targeted at foreign manufacturing.

Castlery co-founder and president Declan Ee told The Straits Times that the import taxes "naturally added cost pressure to the business", as the US accounts for about 70 per cent of its global revenue.

The company has been building its presence in other overseas markets to widen its international footprint.

It is one of the 1,700 businesses that EnterpriseSG supported in 2025 to grow their revenue and strengthen cost competitiveness.

This came during a volatile year of rising trade tensions, technological disruptions and evolving supply chains, EnterpriseSG said dur-

ing its annual media briefing on Jan 28.

It added that 2,400 of the businesses embarked on transformative projects, which include efforts to deepen their market presence and improve cost efficiencies.

The projects are expected to increase the companies' annual revenues by \$12.3 billion, amounting to an average of \$7.5 million in additional revenue per company, and to create 10,000 skilled jobs.

EnterpriseSG chairman Lee Chuan Teck acknowledged that its latest projections for revenue and jobs growth were lower than what it projected at its previous annual briefing in 2025 because of the gloomier global outlook.

He said many businesses had adopted a "wait-and-see mode" for a period after April 2025, when Mr Trump imposed tariffs on almost every country.

Businesses that have since fronted transformative projects have also been more risk-averse, with many starting smaller-scale, software-related projects that come with lower costs, Mr Lee added.



HELPING TO FORGE LINKS

**Enterprise Singapore supported this phase of growth by connecting us with partners, agencies and local networks on the ground, which made a big difference in helping us understand new markets quickly and enter with confidence. This kind of ecosystem support is especially helpful for Singapore-based companies expanding overseas.**



**CASTLERY CO-FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT DECLAN EE**, on the company's internationalisation efforts. In 2025, it entered the British market, launched its Canadian e-commerce store, and opened its second Australian showroom in Brisbane.

Mr Declan Ee, co-founder and president of home-grown furniture brand Castlery, says the company will continue working closely with Enterprise Singapore, while investing in major markets in 2026 even as the international operating environment remains uncertain.  
PHOTO: CASTLERY

closely with trade associations and chambers and work with industry partners to help more businesses harness artificial intelligence.

Mr Ee said the results of Castlery's internationalisation efforts, which have been in the works for several years, showed in 2025 when it entered the British market, launched its Canadian e-commerce store, and opened its second Australian showroom in Brisbane.

"Enterprise Singapore supported this phase of growth by connecting us with partners, agencies and local networks on the ground, which made a big difference in helping us understand new markets quickly and enter with confidence," he said.

"This kind of ecosystem support is especially helpful for Singapore-based companies expanding overseas."

The company plans to continue investing in major markets in 2026, even as the international operating environment remains uncertain.

"This is where we continue working closely with EnterpriseSG and their in-market experts to enable us to mitigate risks," Mr Ee said.

"Our focus is on being selective about where we deploy capital, prioritising initiatives that strengthen the core business and support long-term brand growth."

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## Stepping up efforts to help Singapore firms seek new growth opportunities

**Rosalind Ang**

Enterprise Singapore (EnterpriseSG) plans to strengthen efforts to help Singapore businesses build resilience and seek new growth opportunities amid an uncertain external economic environment.

One of the national agency's priorities is increasing support for Singapore companies' overseas expansion efforts, both to make new forays and to continue navigating an evolving business and tariff landscape.

To do so, EnterpriseSG will deepen its overseas presence, including by operating new overseas centres and working with trade associations and chambers (TACs) to provide on-the-ground support for businesses looking to internationalise.

"Today, we have offices in over 35 cities. We will add two more in the United States this year and in

other regions as the need arises. We also worked with the Singapore Business Federation to launch two new Singapore Enterprise Centres in Dubai and Bengaluru," said EnterpriseSG chairman Lee Chuan Teck, who spoke at its annual media briefing on Jan 28.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is also one area EnterpriseSG plans to focus more on by helping companies across various sectors to use it to transform their business and uplift their efficiencies.

"To understand how we can use AI to transform companies, we have conducted workshops with trade associations and companies in the logistics, manufacturing and wholesale trading sectors. The workshops revealed some systemic changes we need to make to enable firms in the sectors to harness the power of AI," said Mr Lee.

"We will partner with industry partners to develop these transformative AI solutions, and also expand the workshops to other sec-

tors."

EnterpriseSG is also developing new ways to reach out and support more enterprises.

"We are looking at enhancing the way we collaborate with our TAC partners. This could be things like helping to establish stronger governance and equipping them with new skill sets and resources, so they can go on to scale their support for enterprises," said Mr Lee.

The agency has also been beta-testing its digital channel to provide companies with more personalised support for market expansion.

"We hope to roll out more features and reach more companies in the year ahead," said Mr Lee.

"What I'm more concerned about is that many SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) don't know where to start - they do not even know what solutions to go for," he said at a question-and-answer session during the media briefing.



EnterpriseSG chairman Lee Chuan Teck and managing director Cindy Khoo at the annual media briefing on Jan 28. One of the national agency's priorities is increasing support for Singapore firms' overseas expansion efforts. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LIUAN

"The focus for this coming year and the next few years is about giving them the knowledge so that they can then tap the support that

we provide, rather than introduce new support that they may not even be aware of," he said.

"It's about broadening our ou-

reach rather than creating new tools for support."

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## Strong desire among older workers to stay economically active



Senior enrolled nurse Lillian Teng Ngwen Hua helping a patient after the smart predictive patient monitoring system, or PreSAGE, triggered an alert during a demonstration at Tan Tock Seng Hospital on Jan 28. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

FROM A1

der workers aged 65 and above has risen from 24.7 per cent in 2015 to 31.5 per cent in 2025, according to Ministry of Manpower data released in November 2025. This reflects both a strong desire among older workers to stay economically active, and a growing availability of opportunities for workers to remain employed.

Prime Minister Lawrence Wong will deliver his 2026 Budget statement on Feb 12.

Besides implementing PreSAGE in more wards, TTSH has tapped CTC grants for another transformation project - a manpower scheduling system that has cut the time needed for nurse managers to draw up duty rosters from 90 minutes to 15 minutes.

The AI-powered system is able to manage nine different shift types, micro-specialisations and hybrid roles, allowing for predictable and flexible scheduling of nurses while balancing work, health and family needs.

TTSH said it has also put in place

**The employment rate among older workers aged 65 and above has risen from 24.7 per cent in 2015 to 31.5 per cent in 2025, according to Ministry of Manpower data released in November 2025. This reflects both a strong desire among older workers to stay economically active, and a growing availability of opportunities for workers to remain employed.**

a suite of age-inclusive workplace practices. About one in 10 of its 10,000 healthcare workers is aged 55 and above.

Such practices include raising its workers' retirement age to 64 and

re-employment age to 69 by July 2025, ahead of national legislation. About 98 per cent of its eligible senior staff have accepted re-employment beyond the statutory retirement age.

TTSH chief human resources officer Lillian Ho Lay Kuan said older workers offer deep experience, care and stability to the hospital.

"By redesigning roles, integrating AI and technology, and creating flexible work options, we continue to empower our workforce to thrive and deliver high-quality care," she said.

NTUC and HSEU president K. Thanalethimi said the hospital's efforts show that when organisations plan ahead and redesign work with their staff in mind, their older workers can continue to contribute with confidence and purpose.

"We urge more employers across the sector to join HSEU and NTUC in driving meaningful transformation that empowers healthcare workers and strengthens care delivery."

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